The Dissertation Committee for Lisa Leit certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Conversational Narcissism in Marriage:
Effects on Partner Mental Health and Marital Quality
Over the Transition to Parenthood

Committee:

_____
Deborah Jacobvitz, Supervisor

_____
Thomas Darwin

_____
Nancy Hazen-Swann

_____
Joan Mullin

_____
Anita Vangelisti

Conversational Narcissism in Marriage:

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Over the Transition to Parenthood

by

Lisa Leit, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Texas at Austin

May 2008

Dedicated in loving memory

to

Cates Anderson Gossett

and

Linda Murray

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Deborah Jacobvitz, my advisor, for guidance and support through the process of writing my dissertation. Her commitment, despite many other pressing obligations, gave me the opportunity to achieve this goal. Additionally, I would like to thank Nancy Hazen-Swann, Joan Mullin, Anita Vangelisti, and Thomas Darwin for the application of their theoretical and conceptual expertise on this thesis.

I am deeply grateful to my parents; siblings Amy, David, and Brian; and my dog Huckleberry for support and encouragement in my darkest hours. Thank you to Joan Yamini-Freeman, Gary Freeman, and their precious daughter Nadia for being my Austin family. To my friends and colleagues, particularly Sydnye Allen, Silvia Bartolic, Scott Blackwood, Candace Boheme, Lila Bouchet, Maggie Brubaker, Melissa Curran, Kristin Doyle, Andy Fiegel, Lynn French, Bonnie Golden, Bill Hatfield, Andrew Jones, Blair Knies, Michelle and Charles Lee, Walter Leite, Elizabeth McKetta, Gabriel Ornelas, Lisa Pagano, Allison Perlman, Doug Roberts, Eliana Schonberg, Tak Sasaki, Michele Solberg, Louise Tedford, and Joani Walsh thank you for your camaraderie, collaboration, and support.

And lastly, a special thanks to Judith Rosall, who encouraged me to pursue an advanced degree and is an outstanding mentor and friend.

Conversational Narcissism in Marriage:

Effects on Partner Mental Health and Marital Quality

Over the Transition to Parenthood

Lisa Leit, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin

Supervisor: Deborah Jacobvitz

This study seeks to explore how narcissistic attention seeking behaviors in face-to-face conversation contribute to marital quality and partner's mental health over the transition to parenthood. Narcissism, considered a personality disorder, is defined as an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity in fantasy or behavior. Central features of narcissism include a need for admiration and a lack of empathy. The concept of narcissism has been extended beyond mental illness and is now considered a personality trait (Raskin & Terry, 1988). It follows then that narcissistic tendencies might affect one's communication style. This research elaborates the concept of narcissism, and discusses the ways that narcissistic patterns in interpersonal relationships have been studied. Finally, drawing upon social exchange theory, it finds that conversational narcissism characterizes 78 percent of marriages, frequently renders spouses invisible, and predicts maladaptive dialogue and divorce at seven years.

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The effects of conversational narcissism in marriage on partner mental health and marital quality during the transition to parenthood

This research draws on social exchange theory to understand how narcissistic attention seeking behaviors in face-to-face conversation contribute to marital quality and partners' mental health over the transition to parenthood. Narcissism, considered a personality disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), is defined as an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity in fantasy or behavior. Central features of narcissism include a need for admiration and a lack of empathy. The concept of narcissism has been extended beyond mental illness and is now considered a personality trait (Raskin & Terry, 1988). It follows then that narcissistic tendencies might affect one's communication style. Several researchers have identified narcissistic strategies, such as conversational shifts and a lack of responsiveness to one's partner, that can create an imbalance in the exchange and distribution of attention in informal conversations (Derber, 1979; Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990). Vangelisti and her colleagues (1990) argue that social exchange theorists would predict that the costs of repeatedly giving more than one receives in a relationship would have negative effects over time. No study has examined empirically narcissistic exchanges in close relationships and whether such behaviors are, ultimately, detrimental to marital outcomes and partners' mental health. After elaborating the concept of narcissism, I will discuss the ways that narcissistic

patterns in interpersonal relationships have been studied. Finally, drawing upon social exchange theory, I will test the negative effects of such communication styles on marital satisfaction and partners' mental health.

Traditional Conceptualizations of Narcissism

To identify the kinds of narcissistic behavior that might be displayed in interpersonal conversations, it is important to describe how the concept of narcissism has evolved. Narcissism was first described in detail by Freud (1915) in his essay "On Narcissism". Freud viewed narcissism as normal during the toddler and preschool period, but pathological when it persists beyond early childhood. Early on, around age three, a focus on the self to the exclusion of others (termed narcissism) is the original source of energy for the development of the ego; it is a primary ingredient for establishing self-esteem and one's expectation of how one should be. Due to a fear of a loss of love and fear of failure, some people show pathological signs of narcissism. They continue to focus too much on themselves as a way of protecting their feelings of vulnerability. Narcissists feel and act as if others owe them and believe they are not receiving what they deserve, regardless of how much others give to them. As a result, narcissists strive for self-sufficiency, perfection, and power over others. They also are highly sensitive to feedback, as they perceive such input as criticism and a demand to change themselves. Yet, they are critical of others who differ from themselves, often seeming overly suspicious and jealous. Kernberg (1975) explains that narcissists experience grandiosity to protect themselves from their feelings of inferiority.

Narcissism in adulthood has been considered by clinicians as a personality disorder, including feelings of grandiosity, a lack of empathy, feelings of jealousy, a tendency to manipulate others and demand recognition, admiration or special treatment even if it is not deserved, an obsession with fantasies of unlimited success, a desire for fear-based power, bodily beauty, a quest for all-conquering love, and a sense of being understood only by unique, special, or high status people (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Although the DSM-IV-TR does not make this distinction, clinical researchers have identified two forms of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), overt and covert (Cooper, 1998; Wink, 1991; Rose, 2002; Smolewska & Dion, 2005). Both overt and covert narcissists are arrogant and self-absorbed, and have a sense of entitlement, a tendency towards exploitiveness, a diminished capacity for empathy, excessive envy, and a lack of sustained enthusiasm for activities or relationships. They also have similar problems with self-representation and self-esteem regulation and fantasies of grandiosity. Compared to covert narcissism, *overt* narcissism has more self-protective benefits, including higher self-esteem, happiness, and life satisfaction (Rose, 2002). *Covert* narcissists have different social self-presentation than overt narcissists, substituting exhibitionism with inhibitions of assertion, and grandiosity with apparent timidity, hypersensitivity, anxiety, and empathic capacity (Wink, 1991).

Narcissism as a Personality Trait

After the APA published the formal criteria for diagnosing narcissism, clinicians and researchers began developing measures to assess this disorder. Interestingly, it

became apparent that narcissistic tendencies could be viewed on a continuum from normal, or subclinical, to pathological; basically, everyone has some propensity to engage in narcissistic behavior. Using the subclinical definition of narcissism provided by the DSM-III (APA, 1980), Raskin and Hall (1979) developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), a self-report measure with both attitudinal and communicative items, to measure individual differences in narcissism in non- clinical populations. Narcissism became viewed as a personality trait consisting of seven components: autonomy, entitlement, exhibitionism, exploitation, self-sufficiency, superiority, and vanity.

Prevalence of Narcissism in America

Although only a small percentage of Americans are diagnosed with NPD, sociologists such as Lasch (1979) and Emmons (1987) have suggested that subclinical narcissistic behavior is prevalent in American culture. According to the DSM IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), narcissistic traits are common among adolescents, but only between 2% and 16% of the population in clinical settings (between 0.5-1% of the general population) are diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) in adulthood. This small percentage might lead some to believe that narcissism is a rare phenomenon in our society, but the majority of Americans shift conversational focus to themselves without showing genuine or sustained interest in others in informal conversations (Derber, 1979), supporting Emmon's (1987) and Lasch's (1979) depiction of the American culture of narcissism. The tendency for individuals to focus on

themselves in conversation supports the individualism and self-interest conducive to achieving and retaining success characteristic of American capitalism (Derber, 1979).

Derber's (1979) research suggests that some degree of conversational narcissism is normative and likely to occur in the majority of interactions between married partners in the U.S. Virtually no empirical study, however, has examined the prevalence of conversational narcissism in marriage. *In the present study, it is expected that more than half of the marriages will be characterized by at least moderate levels of conversational narcissism before the birth of their first child, with extreme conversational narcissism evident in at least a quarter of relationships. The rationale for this exploratory question comes from Derber's qualitative findings (1979) and Emmon's (1987) and Lasch's (1979) sociological portrayals of the self-focus inherent to American culture.*

Narcissism as an Interpersonal Communication Style

Based on observations of conversationalists' self-absorption, Derber (1979) coined the term conversational narcissism, defined as an individual's need for conversational attention at the expense of others. Although he did not link the behaviors he observed to any type of clinical measure or diagnosis, he did identify subtle narcissistic tendencies present during the majority of informal conversations that work to gain attention while maintaining appearances of required civility. To identify narcissistic tendencies in interpersonal conversation, it is important first to discuss how mutual exchanges between partners occur.

His ideas were based on findings from two studies. The first involved field studies of face-to-face interactions in six designated settings: family households, workplaces, restaurants, classrooms, dormitories, and therapy groups. Trained observers, working from a standardized observation guide, wrote qualitative accounts of 1500 interactions in these settings. They focused on the amount of visual and topical attention given to each participant and factors determining who receives the most and least attention (Derber, 1979).

His second study involved tape recording and transcription of one hundred informal dinner conversations among acquaintances and friends in restaurants, dining halls, and households. Each conversation involved the participation of different volunteers; altogether the study involved the participation of 320 conversationalists. Special consideration was given to whose topics were discussed and the specific processes by which people seek to turn the conversation to themselves (Derber, 1979).

Narcissistic conversational styles. Derber (1979) asserted that observed self-absorbed conversational behaviors can lead to perceptions of narcissism. Although he did not link his observations to measured levels of narcissism, the existing empirical research supports the notion that individuals with an inflated view of themselves, not necessarily to pathological levels, display self-centered communication styles during interactions (Colvin, Colvin, Block, & Funder,1995). These practices are often extremely subtle, as social norms prohibit overtly self-centered behavior (Goffman, 1955). One specific example is Raskin and Shaw's (1988) finding that subjects scoring high on the

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) used more first person singular pronouns and fewer first person plural pronouns than their less narcissistic peers during extemporaneous monologues. No relationship between levels of narcissism and use of second or third person pronouns was found (Raskin & Shaw, 1988).

Self-absorbed conversationalists are likely to engage in monologues as they will be reluctant to turn attention to others to engage in the series of turns of talk required by dialogue with others (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Research on the types of disruptions to this process has mostly focused on how much people talk instead of the topics of conversation (Okamoto & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Conversation analysts focus on interruptions, overlaps, back-channel cues, and other turn taking structures (Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Clay-Warner, and Funk, 1996; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1990; Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989; Smith-Lovin & Robinson, 1992). Little attention has been paid to topics or what is being talked about. Researchers usually break conversations down into small units, (e.g. action opportunities) or aggregate it into larger, non-structured units such as total participation.

Derber (1979) recognized two specific ways that conversationalists shift the focus of attention from their partner to themselves. Conversational narcissism occurs when either one of these two conversational shift-responses changes the focus of attention from another person to the self-absorbed participant. The first strategy narcissists employ is the repeated use of active shift responses to subtly turn topics of others into topics about themselves. These types of shift responses do not necessarily change the topic, but create

the possibility. Often while changing the topic, listeners link the response to the speakers and preface their own topic with an acknowledgement of the speakers' topics.

Example #1 of an active shift response:

John: I'm feeling really starved.

Mary: Oh, I just ate.

Example #2 of another active shift response:

Mary: I had a terrible day today.

John: I had a terrible day today too!

The second technique is a passive shift response, but it still serves to gain the focus of attention. In this case, listeners provide just enough responsiveness to the other's topics for the speaker to perceive the listener as paying attention, but the unengaged topics die and leave the floor open. Although such shifts may be intended to communicate empathy, they are much less conducive to encouraging the speaker to elaborate when contrasted with supportive questions and responses, such as paraphrasing and validating comments characteristic of active listening (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Unlike conversational replies likely to keep the focus on the other's topic, this attention-gaining tactic involves a listener's use of the minimal utilization of supportive responses. Weak responses such as "yeah," "uh-huh," and "hmmm" satisfy minimal requirements for social norms of politeness and avoid alienating the speaker, but discourage the elaboration of the topic.

Example of a passive shift response:

Mary: I had a terrible day today.

John: Mmmm hmmm.

The passive shift responses can be likened to Duncan and Fiske's (1977) listener backchannels, brief vocalizations, head nods, and facial movements that convey to the speaker that the listener is tracking.

Self-oriented conversationalists mix shift-responses with support-responses, such as making a temporary response to others' topics before shifting the focus, or ask seemingly other-focused questions that actually introduce topics that they themselves want to talk about, leaving the impression that they have interest in others as well as themselves (Derber, 1979; Maynard, 1980; Vangelisti, et al., 1990).

Derber (1979) describes these civil responses as ritual acknowledgements that he or she is paying attention. Civil obligations regarding responsiveness indicate that the responsibility for sustaining topics is shared, though it lies predominantly with the initiator. Subtle differences in responsiveness significantly affect the extent to which a topic is kept alive. Required civil responses give speakers freedom to continue initiatives without blatant interruptions, but do not indicate support of a topic.

The passive narcissistic practice of minimal use of supportive responses communicates a subtle unresponsiveness. In this case, the requirements of civil responses are met, but there is a relative neglect of supportive responses. A variety of studies suggest that background acknowledgements facilitate the unfolding of topics and that

their absence or delay can easily disrupt the development of the speaker's topic (Zimmerman & West, 1975). Such passive shift responses rarely are employed consciously to get attention, but Derber found that their use was a common way conversational narcissists open the floor to their own topics. The second passive practice employed is differential use, or responding with the weakest supportive response required by civility (Derber, 1979).

Derber's identification of sophisticated narcissistic communication strategies provides valuable insight into the tension between maintaining appearances of civility and individuals' initiatives to gain and keep attentional focus. A limitation to his approach of examining specific attention exchange patterns in informal conversations in order to make broader societal generalizations is that it neglects to address the nuances of the interpersonal dynamics of the conversationalists. Derber's conceptualization of conversational narcissism as a consistently recurring pattern of self-absorbed attention seeking behavior detrimental to others manifested in varying degrees by various individuals is comprehensive and sophisticated (1979). His qualitative analysis of informal conversations focuses on identifying specific narcissistic strategies in order to discern larger patterns. A problem with this approach is that the complexity of interactions between people who know one another well is difficult to capture by examining topic shifts in any one particular conversation in the course of a long-term relationship because couples often develop their own private communication that varies to accommodate changing contextual and interpersonal demands.

One limitation of Derber's micro analytic approach to coding is that, in marriage, certain conversational shifts are likely to have more interactional meaning than others based on personalities, relationship dynamics, and conversational patterns unique to specific couples. If a husband mentions that he was fired from his job and his wife responds that she bought a new dress that day, the active conversational shift is likely to be more upsetting to the husband than if he mentions that he fed the dog and she responds that she fed the cat.

A related pattern likely to affect the impact of conversational self-focus, but not taken into account with micro analytic coding is the extent to which people have competitive versus cooperative motives underlying their conversational tactics. Derber (1979) believes that competition for attention is a defining characteristic of conversational narcissism. Competition develops when people seek to capture and keep attentional focus on themselves, whereas a cooperative dynamic is created when those involved are willing and able to share it and give it (Derber, 1979).

With respect to cooperation, Tannen (1984) asserted that an exchange of I-oriented responses, or mutual revelations in which both persist in talking about themselves, can actually be a way for some couples to show an understanding and concern for each other's statements by offering comparable personal statements. She postulated that it is possible for two conversationally self-focused individuals to be engaged and involved in healthy interactions if there is an unspoken understanding of mutual regard and openness to the other's topic when it is independently asserted. As

long as both feel that the dynamic is appropriate, it would not be considered problematic for the relationship.

A second limitation is that, although Derber (1979) defines conversational narcissism as an individual's need for conversational attention at the expense of another, in his analysis of ways individuals strive to obtain attention he does not elaborate means to determine the extent to which the other is affected one way or another. The dyadic adaptive dialogue macro analytic scale developed for this study will help to explore the degree to which the use of such strategies causes problems for others taking into account the situational context, the emotional tenor of the interaction, perceptions of intent and degree of underlying concern, and the personalities of both parties (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). Given that the passivity of a response to a bid for emotional support in a time of vulnerability from a marriage partner is likely to be hurtful, whereas a passive response to a more banal topic might not be at all hurtful, a scale measuring passivity, or the failure to respond or evasive strategies in response, was also developed. See Appendix A for complete coding criteria for these two scales (i.e. dyadic adaptive dialogue and individual passivity).

Vangelisti, et al. (1990) built on Derber's model of conversational narcissism by conducting six studies designed to explore the ways in which a perceived imbalance of conversational participation and attention may be observed in conversation. Rather than focusing only on outsiders' perceptions of interactions, Vangelisti and her colleagues (1990) emphasized the insiders' perceptions. They suggested that a conversation is

deemed narcissistic only if all conversational participants viewed the speakers' style as problematic. According to this view, even if the speaker does most of the talking, speakers are conversationally narcissistic only if the dynamic is injurious to listeners. They thus broaden Derber's definition so that it takes Tannen's (1984) point, that parallel I-oriented exchanges may not be detrimental for couples, into consideration.

Vangelisti and her colleagues (1990) developed and validated a behavior-based typology for conversational narcissism and for conversational responses to conversational narcissism. They asked undergraduate students to report on role-plays and hypothetical situations or recollections from past interactions. First, they provided students with the following definition:

> These are people who, whenever talking with others, consistently focus the attention of the conversation on themselves. They talk about themselves, and when a conversation turns away from them, they seem to always find a way to switch it back to themselves. They are, in other words, extremely self-absorbed when they converse with others (p. 256).

Next, they asked participants to brainstorm a list of the verbal and nonverbal behaviors such self-absorbed individuals use to focus the attention on themselves. The resulting 554 behavioral descriptions were grouped according to similarities into one of four categories drawn from the psychological literature: Self-importance, exploitation, exhibitionism, and impersonal relationships. Only 3% of the responses were not codable into one of the categories. The most frequent behavioral categories reported by students were

exploitation (31.5%), exhibitionism (31.3%), self-importance (23%), and impersonal relationships (15.4%).

To obtain a representative sampling of conversational narcissistic behaviors, pairs of students were asked to role-play a conversation lasting ten minutes. One was asked to "act as narcissistic in your conversational patterns as possible without making it very obvious what you are doing. You should generally assume the attitude that you are the most important and interesting aspect of this interaction." The non-narcissistic person was asked "to carry on a conversation with your partner in the same way you would if you were in idle chit-chat in a lounge, bar, or the student union". Two one-minute segments (minute three and minute seven) of each videotaped interaction were selected for coding to obtain a representative sampling of behaviors over the course of each conversation. Each interaction was coded using a four-category scheme: Self-Importance, Exploitation, Exhibitionism, and Impersonal Relationships. Behaviors were then coded within each category and summed. For all four categories, the role-playing conversational narcissists engaged in the behaviors significantly more frequently than their conversational partners. Within the Self-importance category, the behaviors most frequently displayed were boasting, giving opinion/advice, and complaining. Within the exploitation category, the most frequent behaviors were "I" statements, shift responses, and variations in talk time. Primping was most frequent in the Exhibition category. Within the Impersonal Relationships category, "you" statements and nervous/distracting adapters were most common.

Although the role-plays were chosen for methodological reasons, they do have limitations in that they may not be representative of the complexities inherent to less contrived interactions. Additional limitations include the potential danger in using the frequency of behaviors as the only measure of their importance. It is likely that some behaviors have different weights than others. A put down may have more detrimental implications than a high frequency of "I" statements.

Vangelisti et al. (1990) provided accounts of the specific behaviors students attribute to conversational narcissists. This method of using perceptions of how conversational narcissists would behave in a hypothetical conversation could get more at stereotypes of narcissism than actual behaviors, especially as the sample was comprised of undergraduates who may be more likely to generalize than older participants. Another limitation is that their study does not address covert narcissism later conceptualized by Cooper (1998), Wink (1991), Rose (2002), and Smolewska and Dion (2005). This more recent research supports the idea that exhibitionism is not necessary to narcissism. This assertion is further supported by the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM-IV-TR) definition of NPD as consisting of five of nine factors, making overt grandiosity and exhibitionism not necessary to the diagnosis of pathological narcissism.

Derber's (1979) conceptualization and observations of conversational narcissism and Vangelisti et al.'s (1990) validated behavior-based typology served as the basis for the coding scheme used in this research to observe marital communicative narcissism.

Conversational narcissism in marriage may be exhibited differently in marriage than in informal conversations or role-plays between relative strangers, but the strengths and limitations of these approaches were considered in the development of the observational measures used in the present study.

Responses to conversational narcissism. Although he asserted that extreme conversational narcissism renders others invisible, Derber (1979) limited his analysis of conversational strategies to attempts to obtain and maintain attention. In addition to building on Derber's work to create and validate a typology of conversational narcissism, Vangelisti and colleagues (1990) used role-plays to determine the verbal and non-verbal responses to the imbalances in attention created by conversational narcissists. When interacting with a narcissistic individual, people demonstrated a greater number of both active and passive coping strategies than they do when interacting with non-narcissistic others. Passive verbal and nonverbal strategies that allowed the imbalance to continue were most commonly employed to cope with conversational narcissism; demonstrating disinterest and taking leave of the situation characterized two-thirds of the behaviors observed $T(30)=2.21$, p is $< .04$). The remaining one-third of the behaviors listed involved active, even narcissistic, strategies, including overt attempts to regain the conversational focus (Vangelisti, et al., 1990).

The first finding, that passive verbal and nonverbal strategies were more frequently employed to cope with conversational narcissism than active strategies, came from a study in which undergraduates in communication courses (N=111) were given the

description of conversational narcissists and several examples of narcissistic behavior (Vangelisti, et al., 1990). They were asked, "How do you deal with people like this when you encounter them? What are the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that you use to cope with their narcissistic behaviors? Please list as many behaviors as you can recall."

The responses were coded into two categories: active and passive. Active strategies were confronting the narcissist's behavior, shifting the topic, maintaining the floor, and bringing in another person. Passive strategies were reduced response, demonstrating disinterest, taking leave, preparing mentally, hearing out, ignoring, and avoiding. Passive strategies were most common (two-thirds of behaviors listed), especially demonstrating disinterest and taking leave of the situation. The remaining 127, or one-third of the behaviors listed, were active strategies. Shifting the topic of conversation was the most frequently listed active strategy (Vangelisti, et al., 1990).

Although hypothetical, this study presented initial findings pointing to a tendency to react to conversational narcissism in relatively indirect ways. Some participants described coping behaviors remarkably similar to those used by conversational narcissists. These people may themselves have narcissistic tendencies, or they may want to give the conversational narcissist a taste of his or her own medicine. Although this study provides some evidence for how individuals may respond to others who consistently engage in conversational behaviors. Since the data comes from self-reports based on recollection, students may be reporting salient, familiar, or socially acceptable responses (Vangelisti, et al., 1990).

The role-plays from the previous study with conversational narcissists with 126 undergraduates were then examined to obtain further elaboration on strategies used to cope with conversational narcissism. In 32 dyads, people interacted with individuals who role-played being narcissistic in conversations. A second group of 31 dyads served as the control group. The behaviors of people not given narcissistic instructions were coded using seven behavior categories: 1) indirectly confronting the narcissistic behavior, 2) directly confronting the narcissistic behavior, 3) shifting topic to self, 4) shifting topic to another topic, 5) reduced response, 6) demonstrating disinterest, and 7) hearing the narcissist out. These categories were selected because they may be overtly displayed in a dyadic role-play situation. Other coping strategies would not be observable such as preparing mentally, leave-taking, or bringing in another person (Vangelisti, et al., 1990).

After coding the behavioral strategies, two larger clusters were created, one composed of active strategies and the other of passive strategies. The behavior of one randomly selected person in each dyad was examined and coded using the seven-category scheme. Again, the seven were combined into two larger categories, active and passive strategies. The two groups differed significantly on both composites. When interacting with a narcissistic individual, people demonstrated a greater number of both active (t (62)=3.29, p <. 002) and passive (t (62)=5.20, p is < .001) coping strategies than they did when interacting with non-narcissistic others. Some reported and engaged in active behavior to deal with the lack of attention they are receiving; these people are not in the majority. Most individuals coped with narcissistic behaviors in relatively passive, non-

participatory ways (T (30)=2.21, p is < .04). These results support those generated from self-report data, but the use of role-plays using individuals who are not well acquainted makes the results only generalizable to brief, initial interaction situations (Vangelisti, et al., 1990).

Thus, the first goal of this study is to examine the effects of conversational narcissism on marriage and specifically, how spouses respond to conversational narcissism. *Based on the existing research, it is expected that high narcissism levels in one spouse will covary with passive strategies in the other to cope with self-absorption in their partners' communications.*

Social Exchange Theory and Effects of Narcissistic Conversational Styles on Marriage

Social exchange theory. Although marriage relationship processes are complex, and vary over the course of time, social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) can help provide insight into the likely effects of conversational narcissism on marital satisfaction, outcomes, and partner mental health over the transition to parenthood. From this theoretical standpoint, partners expect an equitable profit balance, or equality of costs and benefits in their marriage. The implications for conversational behavior are that partners expect reciprocity in conversations with their spouses unless there is a norm supporting an imbalance. Conversational narcissism may be detrimental to marriages in that it violates both conversational maxims (Grice, 1975), and the norm of reciprocity, which specifies that people should return benefits given to them in a relationship (Gouldner, 1960).

Social exchange theorists predict relationship behavior as a function of costs, benefits, and comparison levels of satisfaction. For a relationship to exist and continue, it must provide a cost/benefit ratio or outcome that compares favorably with competing alternative situations. Social exchange theory posits that individuals are motivated by the desire to maximize rewards, or positive reinforcements for behavior, and minimize costs, or negative reinforcements for behavior.

From a social exchange theory perspective, a discrepancy in partners' perceptions of their social exchange value, or what they give, receive, and deserve to receive in the relationship, is likely to cause marital problems. Sources of rewards influencing the balance in partners' comparison level, include love, power, respect, attractiveness, age, education level, income, social status, chance of having a better relationship with someone else, self-esteem, and entitlement (Blau, 1964; Foa & Foa, 1980). If partners perceive that the costs outweigh the rewards, they will be dissatisfied and may leave the relationship if attractive alternative choices are available. If partners view one another as having comparable social exchange values, and perceive their relationship as an overall equitable balance of give and take, they will be satisfied and stay in the relationship as partners will choose whichever behavior maximizes long term profit. When long-term profits are equal, partners choose the alternative that provides the most short-term profit. In a marriage perceived as having no rewards, a partner will seek to minimize costs.

Derber's (1979) ideas are compatible with those of exchange theory. He believes that conversational narcissism results from an individualistic culture characterized by

competition for attention. Basically, conversational attention is the desired commodity or reward. People are encouraged to concentrate on gratifying their own needs by focusing on themselves without assuming responsibility for others beyond the norms of civility. In order for this to be socially acceptable, powerful individuals openly competing for the floor may put on an appearance of concern for others. Based on his analysis of over 100 dinner conversations, with one exception, when topics about one of the participants were initiated, they were initiated by that person himself or herself. Derber concluded that people concentrate on initiating topics about themselves and assume that others will do the same (1979).

In addition to coining such conversational self-focus conversational narcissism, Derber also describes the related phenomenon of invisibility. He observes that the most extreme form of conversational narcissism occurs when one self-absorbed partner renders a less powerful or competitive conversational partner invisible and excluded (Derber, 1979) by acting as if the partner does not exist or matter. Derber asserts that people will only tolerate conversational narcissism if they have to, that is, if they feel powerless, or if they can gain power by needing to be needed.

Gender and conversational narcissism. Derber (1979) postulated that patriarchy and the American class system lead to important differences between men and women and between dominant and subordinate economic groupings in ways of exchanging attention and prospects of receiving it. He asserted that women and members of underprivileged socioeconomic groups are assigned roles that require the subordination

of self and the giving of attention. Using the metaphor of attention as economic resource, being female was one risk factor for membership in a disadvantaged position relative to men who typically receive larger shares of attention (Derber, 1979). Women were more likely than men to give than command conversational attention, a valuable cultural commodity from his perspective (Derber, 1979). Derber hypothesized that this tendency was due to power differentials between men and women. He interpreted attention-getting behaviors as an expression of social inequality.

Derber's findings (1979) that men are more likely to engage in conversational narcissism than women are supported by research on pathological narcissism and research on the higher survival rate of men's topics. A slight majority of clinically diagnosed narcissists (50-75%, according to the DSM-IV-TR) are men (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Additional evidence for this tendency comes from Fishman (1977, 1983). He studied heterosexual couples and discovered that men and women raised similar numbers of topics, but men's attempts were successful 96 % of the time, while women's attempts were successful only 36 % of the time (Fishman, 1977, 1983).

An additional body of research on communion and agency supports the idea that husbands are more likely than their wives to demonstrate conversational narcissism. Using concepts of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966), Helgeson (1994) developed a theoretical model of the relations among biological sex, gender-linked personality traits, and physical and psychological health. Given that narcissists are high in agency and low

in communion (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Paulus & John, 1998), her work is useful in making predictions about gender differences in the expression of narcissistic behavior during couple conversations.

Similar to Derber's hypothesis about gender socialization impacting behaviors and levels of entitlement, a basic assumption of Helgeson's (1994) model is that men and women are socialized to adopt somewhat different social roles and personality characteristics associated with those roles that result in specific behaviors and orientations towards themselves and others. Empirical studies support this idea. Men more often display personality traits related to agency (Helgeson, 1994). Agency reflects a positive focus on the self, and does not have implications for other-oriented outcomes, attitudes, or interpersonal difficulties. The focus on self is not associated with interpersonal difficulties or negative health consequences. Unmitigated agency has a number of negative implications for health and relationships, which is logical given the similarity between the identifying characteristics of unmitigated agency and high levels of narcissism.

Both unmitigated agency (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998) and high levels of narcissism (Cooper, 1998; Wink, 1991; Rose, 2002; Smolewska & Dion; 2005) share arrogance and self-absorption, a sense of entitlement and a tendency towards exploitiveness, a diminished capacity for empathy, excessive envy, and a lack of sustained enthusiasm for activities or relationships (Cooper, 1998; Wink, 1991; Rose, 2002; Smolewska & Dion; 2005). Additionally, unmitigated agency frequently is comprised of hostility, which has

been associated with interpersonal difficulties and physical illnesses (see Smith, 1992, for a review). Unmitigated agency predicted detrimental relationship dynamics, and poor physical and mental health outcomes due to its association with a lack of support from others, a reluctance to ask others for help, and a range of poor health behaviors related to their negative view of others (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998).

Some theorists (Helgeson, 1994; Hoffman, 2001; Spence & Buckner, 2000) have objected to considering agency a male trait and communion a female characteristic. Yet, in further support of Derber's theory of gender socialization, men are more likely to exhibit agency, unmitigated agency, and narcissism, women are more likely to develop personality traits related to communion (Helgeson, 1994). Spence (1984) argued that existing scales are actually measures of personality traits, not gender characteristics.

While the traits themselves may not be gendered, research indicates that women are more likely to possess traits of communion and be more at risk for unmitigated communion, and being male predicts higher levels of agency and higher risk for unmitigated agency (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Women may act in communal ways to promote health and relationships because altruistic behaviors are valued and expected of them and play a role in maintaining their romantic relationships with men. Unmitigated communion is related to self-neglect, difficulties asserting needs to others, susceptibility to exploitation, inhibiting self-expression to avoid conflict, and difficulties with self-disclosure (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998; Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Unmitigated communion is

also related to self-effacement and self-subjugation (tolerating insults, accepting verbal abuse, repeatedly apologizing; Buss, 1990).

Both unmitigated communion and unmitigated agency have been linked to isolation and a lack of social support during emotional and physical crises leading to poor adjustment to a wide range of illnesses, including diabetes and coronary heart disease (Helgeson & Fritz, 1996; Saragovi et al., 1997). Regardless of whether Derber was correct in his theory of gender socialization, research on the constructs of narcissism, agency, and communion suggest that men are more at risk for conversational narcissism, and women for invisibility behaviors in marriage. Thus, a second goal of this study is to examine whether gender is a risk factor for conversational narcissistic behaviors in marriage. *It is hypothesized that males will be more likely than females to engage in narcissistic behaviors during conversations with their spouse.*

Marital satisfaction. Over the past decade and a half, relationship researchers have identified interpersonal and contextual processes that influence marital satisfaction such as affect and behavioral patterning, perceived mate availability, and social attractiveness (see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000 for a review). Less is known about how conversational narcissism influences partners' assessment of marital satisfaction. Although some compensatory qualities may accompany the trait, people view conversational narcissism negatively (Vangelisti, et al., 1990), and I predict that spouses will perceive conversational narcissism as a cost to their relationship.

The degree to which conversational narcissism in marriage would be negatively

perceived by a partner could depend on the partners' social exchange value since such behavior is likely to detract from marital satisfaction. High status people (parents, doctors, high-power spouses) often enjoy privileges in conversation that low status people (children, patients, women, low-power spouses) do not (Okamoto & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Thus partners of lower status in a relationship with a status discrepancy might tolerate conversational narcissism much more happily than a partner of higher or comparable status.

Also, behaviors that are generally seen as negative may not necessarily be perceived in the same way by all individuals (Cupach & Spritzberg, 1994). Narcissists' behavior is often considered especially inappropriate by those unwilling to relinquish claim to their fair share of conversational attention (Vangelisti, et al., 1990). It follows that individuals who desire a reciprocal marriage relationship will view conversational narcissism as more of a cost than someone attracted to "maladaptive" relations with others (Kowalski, 1997). Individuals with negative self-images may seek out relationships that confirm and reinforce their self-conceptions (Swann, 1983). This suggests that individuals with low self-esteem may tolerate working with a narcissistic individual, or even find comfort in the self-confirming poor treatment they receive from the narcissist. Although it is possible that narcissists could react positively to other narcissists due to their attraction to their partners' cognitive similarity (Sjöberg & Thorslund, 1978) personality similarity (Barry, 1970; George, 1990; Schneider, 1987) and attitude similarity (Brehm & Kassin, 1993), attitudes of entitlement and tendencies

towards the interpersonally exploitation of others would probably conflict and contribute to marital dissatisfaction.

Conversational narcissism observed in couple interactions is likely to reflect narcissistic personality traits and may predict the types of maladaptive relationship tactics linked to narcissism. Narcissism is characterized by relationship-oriented behavioral patterning likely to be detrimental to partner marital satisfaction. Relevant research in personality and social psychology using the NPI (Raskin & Hall, 1979) found psychosocial correlates to normal and subclinical narcissism using self-report surveys of the major theoretical statements and clinical descriptions of narcissism. Narcissism consists of observable and covert maladaptive functioning in six domains. Of interest to this review are characteristics relating to interpersonal relationships (Akhtar & Thomson, 1982). Narcissists' relationships lack depth and involve contempt for and devaluation of others while covertly envying them and seeking praise (Akhtar & Thomson, 1982). This inflated sense of self-worth is associated with argumentativeness (Colvin, et al., 1995) and hostility (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), narcissistic selfishness (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998), and self-centeredness (Emmons, 1987).

Narcissists report lower interest in intimacy (Carroll, 1987) and caring (Campbell, 1999), perhaps because those providing narcissists with undesired feedback are likely to be attacked by narcissists hypersensitive to threats to their self-esteem (John & Robins, 1994; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993; Kernis & Sun, 1994; Hendin & Cheek, 1997). Perceived

attacks on a narcissistic individual's sense of self can invoke strong, negative responses such as hostility and aggression. Power struggles are likely to emerge as narcissism has been found to be related to interpersonal dominance and competitiveness (Carroll, 1987).

Overt conversational narcissism is likely to predict marital dissatisfaction more than less obvious self-focusing. *Thus it is expected that conversational narcissism in the marriage when the conversational narcissist has poor social skills will predict marital dissatisfaction for partners above and beyond conversational narcissism in the marriage with a narcissistic partner who is socially adept. Conversational narcissism in marriage with couples engaging in adaptive dialoguing, where, even after periods of self-focus, both partners ultimately express themselves and listen to one another, is expected to predict happily satisfied couples above and beyond prenatal dyadic conversational narcissism in marriage in couples with maladaptive dialogue, in which couples do not balance self and other focus in conversation.*

Conversational narcissists are also likely to feel dissatisfied with their marriages as they will feel that they can do better. Although they may be charismatic and engaging, narcissistic people maintain the appearance of positive relationships with others only as long as it serves their own purposes (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997). These results support findings in psychological literature that suggest that conversational narcissists may tend to have impersonal interpersonal relationships (Biscardi & Schill, 1985; La Vopa, 1981; Little, Watson, Biderman, & Ozbek, 1992; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991). Narcissists exhibit game-playing love styles in ongoing romantic

relationships, while at the same time reporting less selfless love (Dorsey, Campbell & Foster, 1999; Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002). Narcissists not only perceive many alternatives to their romantic relationship, but report attending to and flirting with these alternatives (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Thus, conversational narcissism may be related to lower levels of marital satisfaction. This is especially likely if the desire of the partner of the narcissist to achieve a mature level of commitment and intimacy clashes with the narcissist's defensive pursuit of ego-reinforcement.

A third dimension for this research to explore is whether conversational narcissism predicts marital dissatisfaction over the transition to parenthood for both partners, and how social exchange factors are likely to affect reports of satisfaction. *Thus, it is expected that conversational narcissism in the marital dyad will predict dyadic marital dissatisfaction over the transition to parenthood.*

Marital stability. From an exchange theory perspective, people stay married based on their perception of the balance of rewards received and costs incurred from the relationship. If a person's net outcome is positive (more rewards and fewer costs), they are likely to stay in the marriage than if their net outcome is negative (fewer rewards, more costs), or than if they perceive that they could realistically achieve a better ratio of rewards with another partner. Narcissistic communication styles may enhance the narcissist's self-esteem, but may be perceived as a cost to the relationship value and have a negative effect on relationship duration.

The literature on narcissism and marriage outcomes indicates that high levels of conversational narcissism are likely to predict dissatisfaction and consequent divorce. A small but growing body of research has been conducted to explore the outcomes of an inflated self-concept (operationalized as narcissism, grandiosity, or positivity of self-views) on relationship functioning (Campbell & Foster, 2002). According to the literature, self-inflation tends to have negative consequences for relational outcomes (Colvin et al., 1995; Paulhus & John, 1998; Campbell & Foster, 2002).

The interpersonal relationships of pathological narcissists (diagnosed as NPD), and those demonstrating narcissistic tendencies are typically impaired due to their lack of empathy (Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984); game-playing love style (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002); exploitiveness (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; Cooper, 1998; Wink 1991); rationalization for unacceptable behavior (Laughlin, 1970; Akhtar & Thompson, 1982; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995); denial of genuine and realistic dependence and relatedness (Gabriel et al., 1994; Lax, 1975; Rothstein, 1980; Shengold, 1995); sense of entitlement (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995); and constant need for attention, or narcissistic supply.

Commitment is crucial to functioning in romantic relationships, and is one of the primary predictors of relationship duration (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, 1980, 1983). Marital commitment, partners' expectations that they will establish and maintain a relationship to one another, is influenced a number of factors including legal, moral, social pressures, and structural constraints (Surra, Hughes, & Jacquet, 1999).

Commitment has several consequences for romantic relationships. Highly committed individuals are likely to behave in ways that help to maintain the relationship, such as accommodation when coping with conflict. Partners high in commitment are likely to discuss the conflict and remain loyal to their partner instead of leaving or ignoring the conflict (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983).

Narcissism is associated with a game-playing love style, lower levels of commitment, and attention to alternatives. Across five studies examining the links between narcissism, self-esteem, and love, narcissism was significantly associated with a game-playing love style, or an aversion to partner dependence, deceptions, and attention to extramarital romantic alternatives, and was linked with both perceived alternatives, attention to alternatives, and lesser commitment (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Commitment was negatively related to both perceptions of alternatives, and attention to alternatives.

Specifically, Campbell and Foster (2002) gave undergraduates self-report measures including a nine-item commitment scale (e.g., "Do you feel committed to maintaining your relationship to your partner?") developed by Rusbult (1983; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965), the 40-item forced-choice version of the NPI (Raskin & Hall, 1979), and the Love Attitudes Scale (LAS; C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1990). Perceived alternatives were also assessed with a measure based on Rusbult (1983; Rusbult et al.,

1991). This measure contained six items and used the same 9-point scale (e.g., "How does the alternative of becoming involved with a different romantic partner compare to your relationship with your current partner?"). Finally, the measure of attention to alternatives was developed by Miller (1997). This measure contained five items (e.g., "I flirt with people of the opposite sex without telling my partner"; "I am distracted by other people that I find attractive"). Next, narcissists' self-reports of game playing, mediated by a need for power and autonomy, were confirmed by partners' in past and current relationships through narratives. Narcissists demonstrated less overall accommodation with partners, and perceive less accommodation on the part of their partners and themselves in their romantic relationships and this finding was mediated by commitment levels (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

Narcissists were described by their past dating partners as game players (e.g., "He was a player" or "It was just a game to him"). Narcissists were also described as being unfaithful in their relationships. Indeed, infidelity was reported in 24% of the narratives about narcissists and only 4% of the narratives about nonnarcissists. Narcissists were described as substantially more flirtatious with others (on a 7-point scale) than were nonnarcissists. This attention to alternatives is partially due to their tendency towards sensation seeking (Emmons, 1991). Narcissists' high levels of self-confidence and self-concept positivity (John & Robins, 1994; Paulhus, 1998; Raskin & Terry, 1998) are also likely to lead to a perception of multiple available alternative romantic partners. Narcissists may develop a pattern of chronically seeking alternative romantic partners as

a strategy to avoid any emotional threat associated with losing long-term committed relationships (Masterson, 1988). Narcissists were also described as being more dishonest and deceptive than were nonnarcissists. Those who dated narcissists also described them as overcontrolling and manipulative. This finding is consistent with narcissists' self-reports (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

Narcissists' game-playing love style, attention to alternatives, and low levels of commitment suggest that marriages characterized by high levels of conversational narcissism would be more at risk for divorce. A fourth goal of this study is to test whether or not narcissistic behavior exhibited during couple interactions predicts divorce. *Thus, it is expected that conversational narcissism in marriage assessed prior to their first child's birth will predict divorce when their child is 24 months old. It is further expected that marriages characterized by conversational narcissism combined with maladaptive social and dialoguing skills will be especially at risk for divorce.*

Conversational Narcissism, Invisibility, and Mental Health

Although NPD is by definition pathological, normal and subclinical levels of narcissism are associated with functional attributes of mental health likely to increase individuals' perceived social exchange value in relationships and protect against depression. In fact, psychological health includes narcissistic components (Bursten, 1982). Normal narcissists score high in self-preservation, self-regard, appropriate aggression, and attention to appearance (Stone, 1998). Even subclinical narcissists just beyond the zone of normal narcissism exhibit feelings of invincibility, heightened self-

regard, and characteristics rewarded in our culture such as self-confidence, competitiveness, charisma, and effective leadership (Stone, 1998). Egotism, an element of narcissism, was linked to reduced shame of failure, low self-doubt, and the motivation to pursue difficult goals (Greenwald, 1980). Such findings indicate that perhaps it is not the narcissist, but rather the narcissist's partner, whose mental health will suffer as a result of the lack of attentional reciprocity in the relationship.

Derber (1979) observed that conversational narcissism often renders the less assertive, shy or insecure partner invisible. Couples possess identities and dynamics that are created and preserved through individual and mutual processes of giving and getting attention, or one of them is at risk for invisibility, or a complete denial of even polite attention from a narcissistic partner. 75% of the conversations Derber studied were characterized by a significant inequality in the distribution of attention, with one person dominating over half of the conversations (1979). It stands to reason that successful relationships require some willingness to set aside personal interests and desires. Perhaps invisibility is an adaptive strategy for relationship maintenance with extremely narcissistic conversationalists who do not acknowledge the legitimacy of others having an independent identity.

From an exchange perspective, invisibility occurs when one narcissistic partner treats the other as if he or she brings no value to the partner or to the relationship, with listeners failing to gain even the minimum attention required to feel that their presence has been acknowledged. Derber (1979) observed that it occurs when the norms of

required civil responses offer insufficient protection against being overlooked and individuals are unable to command attention through their own initiatives. Partners who are in marriages where they act or are rendered invisible by conversationally narcissistic spouses often may face a choice of leaving the relationship or sacrificing their desire for attention in the relationship.

Researchers on sacrifice and related topics suggest that there are both costs and benefits to giving up one's immediate desires in relationships. Empirical researchers have focused almost exclusively on the potential benefits of sacrificing oneself for intimate relationships, including increased marital satisfaction and a greater likelihood of persistence over time (Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Feminist clinicians and researchers have found the subordination of one's true wishes and desires in a relationship to be associated with increased psychological distress and decreased relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2002; Fritz & Helgeson, 1998; Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). They have argued that such sacrifice dynamics are likely to cause dependency, relationship dissatisfaction, and depression (Jack, 1991; Jordon, 1991; Lerner, 1988).

Furthermore, researchers on the construct of "unmitigated communion" (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998; Helgeson & Fritz, 1998), have shown that invisibility behavior, focusing on others to the exclusion and neglect of oneself, is linked to depressive symptoms (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998) and intrusive relationship patterns (Fritz & Helgeson, 2000). Interestingly, individuals high in unmitigated communion often establish marriage

relationships by putting their partners' needs first, according to self-reports by both marital partners (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998; Helgeson & Fritz, 1999; Helgeson, 1993).

From an exchange perspective, invisibility is similar to poverty, with listeners failing to gain even the minimum attention required to feel that their presence has been acknowledged. Derber (1979) observed that it occurs when the norms of required civil responses offer insufficient protection against being overlooked and individuals are unable to command attention through their own initiatives. The degree to which listeners tolerate this negating treatment is likely to be related to their perceptions of what they deserve given their estimations of personal social exchange value relative to their partner and their comparison level of alternatives. Partners with high self-esteem are unlikely to remain in such relationships for long, but spouses who stay are likely to become depressed and experience a gradual erosion of self-esteem and corresponding perceptions of value and mobility.

Although narcissistic traits offer protective mental health benefits, long term involvement in a relationship with a partner allowing an ongoing dynamic of devaluation is likely to be depressing to narcissistic partners believing themselves superior and entitled to partners with corresponding levels of self-evaluation and overall social exchange value, real and perceived. Thus, the final issue for this study to explore is whether invisibility in marriage predicts depressive symptoms in one or both partners.

Thus, the final hypotheses are that invisibility in marriage will predict depression in the non-narcissistic partner and divorce when the first child is 24 months old as well as divorce when the child is seven years old.

The Transition to Parenthood

The transition to parenthood is a period of disequilibrium when parents experience new roles, circumstances and demands, and experience individual changes in areas such as self-perception, personal efficacy, affective states, personal maturity, and values (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988). The birth of a child changes a family and a marriage. Many people feel that having a child would help bring unhappy and emotionally distant couples closer. The changes in parents' lives during the early postpartum period, however, have been found to be more negative than positive and the transition to parenthood is equally disruptive for men, women, and for the couple (see Cowan & Cowan, 1988 for a review). The complexity of the dynamics involved in the transition to parenthood make it difficult to hypothesize exactly how the marriage will be affected. Logically, however, the stress involved in the transition (i.e., Benedek, 1959; Hill, 1949; Hobbs, 1965), makes it unlikely that having a child serves as a stabilizing force for marriages in which partners do not have a solid communication base.

Although it is as yet unexplored in research, the transition to parenthood may add particular stress to the marriage when a parent or both parents are narcissistic. The new addition to the family may take the partner's attention away from the narcissistic partner, and the narcissistic parent may either be jealous and compete with the baby for the

partner's attention, or simply look elsewhere for attention. This may put the family dynamic at risk either by creating tension or because the transition to parenthood may be a high risk time for the marriage in terms of affairs or divorce.

The gender of the conversationally narcissistic partner may play a role in how the partners and the marriage fares across the transition to parenthood. A narcissistic husband may be more likely to put unreasonable demands on his wife for attention, or have an affair. A narcissistic wife, however, might be more likely to demand from her husband help in parenting and attention that might actually involve the husband in the child's life in positive ways. A wife may also be more socialized to identify status with the role of mother and therefore pour a great deal of energy into shaping her progeny as an extension of herself. The hypotheses of this study will explore these ideas.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. High narcissism levels in one spouse will be correlated with invisibility and passive strategies in the other.

Hypothesis 2. The second hypothesis is that men will be more likely than women to engage in conversationally narcissistic behaviors.

Hypothesis 3a. The third hypothesis is that types of marriages characterized by conversational narcissism prenatally will predict greater dyadic marital dissatisfaction over the transition to parenthood.

Hypothesis 3b. It is also expected that prenatal dyadic conversational narcissism in the marriage paired with maladaptive dialoguing in the dyad, will predict dyadic marital dissatisfaction over the transition to parenthood *above and beyond* prenatal dyadic conversational narcissism in the marriage alone.

Hypothesis 4a. The fourth hypothesis is that prenatal dyadic conversational narcissism will predict divorce when their child is 24 months and seven years old.

Hypothesis 4b. It is also expected that prenatal conversational narcissism in the marriage, paired with maladaptive dialoguing in the dyad, will predict divorce when their child is 24 months old *above and beyond* prenatal conversational narcissistic dyads when the narcissistic partner is socially adept.

Hypothesis 5. Prenatal invisibility in marriage will predict depression when their child is 24 months old in one or both partners.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of the Partners and Parents Project, a longitudinal study that followed 125 couples expecting their first child from before their child was born until the child was seven years old to examine relationships in the family over the transition to first-time parenthood. Couples were recruited from Austin, Texas and vicinity via birthing classes, newspaper announcements, radio announcements, and flyers. The median age of the participants was 30.5 and the median family income was $30,000 to $45,000. The majority, 60%, of the sample had completed a bachelor's or graduate degree, while 30% reported attending some college, trade, or business school for some period of time. Only English speaking couples living together were included in the sample, and 94.4% of couples were married. The racial distribution was 85% Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, 3% African-American, and 4% other or biracial. Couples received bimonthly newsletters about the research, a T-shirt, an audiotape of lullabies, and a videotape of their families' interactions. They were also paid $150 in savings bonds for their children for their contributions to the study.

Of the original sample of 125 families, the current study consists of 89 families who completed both the dyadic prenatal interaction, the 24 month triadic interactions, and provided marital status at 7 years. Of the 36 couples not included in this study at 7 years, 14 had divorced and 22 withdrew from the study. Of the 22 families who dropped out of

the study before the 7 year data collection, 15 moved away, four were too busy, and three could not be located. The 89 participants did not differ from the whole sample on age, income, educational level, or racial distribution.

Procedure

The Partners and Parents Project consisted of five phases of data collection over the course of seven years. Data collected from the first, or prenatal, the fourth, 24 months, and the fifth phases, 7 years, will be included in this study. Specifically, couples were videotaped interacting on a series of problem-solving tasks during the prenatal visit. At 24 months, mothers and fathers independently completed self-report assessments of depression and marital quality. At 7 years martial status data was obtained by researchers contacting participants to schedule the fifth phase of data collection.

Measures

Narcissism in the marriage. At the prenatal home visit, couples were videotaped for 30 minutes in their homes participating in three discussion tasks. First, they discussed how their relationship had changed over the course of the pregnancy. Second, they were asked to come up with and discuss an area of disagreement. Third, they were asked to plan an activity they would enjoy doing together. Couple interactions were rated at both the individual and dyadic levels. At the individual level, couples were rated on three 7-point scales, including narcissism, or level of self-focus; response passivity, or the degree to which the partner avoids confrontations; and conversational appropriateness, the level of social skills and interpersonal savvy displayed during the interaction.

Prenatal interaction scales for coding marital interactions. Two raters, blind to all other assessments, independently coded interactions of each couple in a 30 minute videotaped prenatal home visit participating in three discussion tasks. First, they discussed how their relationship had changed over the course of the pregnancy. Second, they were asked to come up with and discuss an area of disagreement. Third, they were asked to plan an activity they would enjoy doing together. Couple interactions were rated at both the individual and dyadic levels. At the individual level, couples were rated on three 7-point scales, including narcissism, or level of self-focus; response passivity, or the degree to which the partner avoids confrontations; and conversational appropriateness, the level of social skills and interpersonal savvy displayed during the interaction. Each coder also rated couples on their 10 minute response to each question. No significant shift between questions was found, as shown in Table 1, therefore the scores used in the present study are the average score of the two coders on their overall interaction assessment. If ratings differed by more than two points, a third trained coder scored the videotapes.

Cronbach's alpha were used to assess interrater agreement on the six scales yielding *alpha* =.75 for dialogue and conversational appropriateness, *alpha* =.85 for wife narcissism, *alpha*= .78 for husband narcissism, *alpha* = .82 for wife and husband passivity, and *alpha* = .61 for invisibility. The *alpha* for invisibility was low as few differences were observed, few individuals scored more than one, and there was little

variability in the scale which made reliability deceptively low. When invisibility was calculated as a binary variable, there was higher agreement, *alpha*=.92.

Prenatal individual narcissism. Levels of narcissism were assessed for each partner using a 7-point scale (1=low, 7=high). People who scored low on narcissism did not engage in self-focus to the detriment of others. High scores reflected narcissistic tendencies, or the degree to which each partner exhibited arrogant and self-absorbed behaviors and attitudes, entitlement, a tendency toward exploitiveness, a diminished capacity for empathy, excessive envy, and a lack of sustained enthusiasm for activities or relationships. The global individual narcissism score for each spouse was based on scores for four other dimensions, each rated on a seven point scale (1=low, 7=high). The first is exploitation versus no exploitation, or the degree to which the spouse teases and/or sabotages the partner. The second is self-absorption versus not self-absorbed, or the extent to which the individual engages in reinterpretations relevant to self and changes the topic to focus on self. The third is entitlement versus no entitlement, or the level of superiority or arrogance displayed. The final dimension is lack of empathy versus no lack of empathy, or the degree to which the partner discloses feelings and indicates care for the vulnerable feelings and emotions expressed by the spouse (see Appendix B).

Prenatal individual invisibility. Levels of invisibility were assessed for each partner using a 7-point scale (1=low, 7=high). Low scores on invisibility reflected little or no evidence of focusing on the partner to the exclusion of the self. High scores reflected self-negating tendencies, or the degree to which each partner exhibited a focus on the

partner to the point of denial of personal needs and desires, self-blame, passive aggression, and looking outside the self for external validation of worth. The global individual narcissism score for each spouse was based on scores for five other dimensions, each rated on a seven point scale (1=low, 7=high). The first is focus on others versus not focused on others, or the degree to which the individual deflects efforts to turn attention to him or her in order to focus on the partner almost exclusively. The second is self-blame versus no self-blame, or the extent to which the individual engages in extreme self-effacement and guilt behaviors. The third is denial of personal needs and desires versus no denial of personal needs and desires, or the degree to which the individual refuses or seems incapable of expressing personal needs, desires, and opinions. The fourth is seeking external validation versus not seeking external validation, or the extent to which the individual looks to the partner for approval. The final dimension is passive aggressive versus not passive aggressive, or the degree to which the partners exhibit indirect control attempts and manipulations (see Appendix D).

Prenatal individual passivity of response strategies. The passive versus active scale is a seven point scale (1=low, 7=high) which assessed the way that each partner responded to displays of conversational narcissism from the spouse (see Appendix D). Low scorers avoided confrontation; they failed to respond at all, or responded in the most evasive or least assertive way possible given social norms. High scorers were extremely active and confrontational in their response to almost every conversational and

interpersonal challenge. An example was a wife telling the narcissistic husband exactly what she thinks about his behavior and shifting the topic to herself.

Prenatal individual conversational appropriateness. The conversational appropriateness versus conversational inappropriateness scale measured the degree to which each partner was able to skillfully exhibit socially saavy conversational skills in an interaction on a scale from 1 to 7. Low scorers demonstrated little to no social skills. They exhibited awkward timing and inappropriate content of responses that did not respond to the partner supportively. High scorers showed savvy attention to subtext and what is happening with the spouse. They diffused tension with cleverness and charm. They paid attention to partners' bids for conversational attention and replied in ways that showed attention to needs and desires of partner. Even if they did not satisfy them, they addressed them (see Appendix E).

Prenatal dyadic adaptive dialogue. The second dyadic score was based on an overall dyadic maladaptive versus adaptive dialogue scale, adapted from Cissna and Anderson, 1994, which measured the level of reciprocity of conversational exchange exhibited in the couple interaction. This scale consists of 7 points (1=low, 7=high). Low scores indicate a display of maladaptive dialogue, and high scores indicate adaptive dialogue (see Appendix F). The global dialogue score was based on scores for seven other dimensions, each rated on a seven point scale (1=low, 7=high). The first is immediacy of presence, or the degree to which participants are relatively uninterested in bringing about specific outcomes. Their communication is mostly unrehearsed and

appear to be operating in the present in their communication. The second factor is the degree to which the interaction is fundamentally improvisational in that it cannot be predicted. The third is the willingness each partner show to be surprised by unfamiliar positions different than their own without assuming that they already knew the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the other. The fourth is the level of concern for the self and other spouses display. This does not rule out heated exchange, but takes the focus away from winning or losing. The fifth is the level of vulnerability partners display in terms of the risks they took and their willingness to share ideas as well as be persuaded by others. The sixth is the degree to which each speaker anticipates the listener and incorporates him or her into the dialogue. The last factor is the temporal flow partners display in terms of the extent to which their dialogue emerges from a past, occupies the present, and anticipates some future. Isolated segments of conversation cannot be easily analyzed.

24-month individual depression. The dependent variable individual depression for both husbands and wives was measured using The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) 24 months after the birth of their first child. The CES-D is designed to measure depressive symptomatology in the general population The CES—D is a 20—item self-report of depressive symptoms experienced in the past week. Items were selected from previously validated depression scales to represent the defining symptoms of depression, including depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, psychomotor retardation, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbance. Each item is rated from 0 to 3 (0=rarely; 1=some of the time;

2=occasionally; 3=most of the time); the total score ranges from 0 (no depressive symptom) to 60 (Radloff, 1977; see Appendix G).

Radloff (1977) reported that the CES-D demonstrated high internal consistency using coefficient alpha and the Spearman-Brown split-halves methods in both the general (about .85) and patient (about .90) populations. Because the CES-D is explicitly intended to measure current levels of depression, the level of reported symptomatology is expected to vary over time, thus lowering test-retest correlations. By taking into account life events, however, Radloff was able to demonstrate adequate test-retest reliability ($r = .54$) for subjects reporting no negative environmental stressors. As expected, the reliability was lower for subjects reporting one negative life event and lowest for subjects reporting negative life events at both testing times.

The CES-D has excellent concurrent validity using both clinical and self-report criteria. The instrument discriminated well between psychiatric inpatient and general population samples and moderately among levels of severity within patient groups. The CES-D also has moderate correlations (.44 to .54) with clinician rating scales at admission and higher correlations (.69 to .75) with these same scales after four weeks of treatment. Additional evidence for discriminant validity lies in the pattern of correlations with interviewer ratings of depression and other scales designed to measure symptoms of depression or general psychopathology. Finally, Radloff reported that the scale is suitable for use with Black and White English-speaking subjects of both sexes with a wide range of age and socioeconomic status. The most common cutoff for a positive screen with the

CES-D is a score greater than 16 (Radloff, 1977). Rather than choosing a single arbitrary cutoff, we created three levels of probability of depression: low probability (CES-D score below 16), moderate (CES-D score of 16 to 22), and high (CES-D score above 22).

24-month happily satisfied couples. Participants still married at 24 months completed an eleven-item non-modified version of Huston, McHale, and Crouter's (1986) Marital Opinion Questionnaire. This measure has been extensively used in the research on hurtful messages (e.g., Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998; Vangelisti & Young, 2000; Young, 2004). The ten-item 10-point semantic differential scales in which respondents characterize their marital relationship with bipolar adjectives, such as miserable-enjoyable, rewarding-disappointing, discouraging-hopeful.

Vangelisti and colleagues assert that this measure was selected because it can provide "a global evaluation of participants' feelings and does not include behaviors (e.g., amount of conflict) reflective of relational quality" (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998, p. 185). Respondents were then asked to base their ratings on their marriage over the previous two months. Following Campbell and his colleagues, the average rating of the eight semantic differential items that clustered together in a series of factor analyses was added to the score on the overall assessment of marital satisfaction and divided by two to create an index of marital satisfaction with possible scores ranging from low (1) to high (7) marital satisfaction (see Appendix H).

Participants were dummy coded as follows: 0 = happily married if they both reported satisfaction with a value above 4 on a satisfaction scale of 1-7, and 1 =

unhappily married (if at least one spouse was dissatisfied, i.e. had a value below 4 on a satisfaction scale of 1-7) or 2=divorced at the time of evaluation.

24-month dyadic divorce status. In the Partners and Parents Project, all couples were expecting their first child and married to their first spouse. When researchers called over the course of the following two years to schedule the 24-month visits, participants informed them of their current marital status: married or divorced.

7 year dyadic divorce status. When researchers called over the course of the following 7 years to schedule the 7 year visits, participants informed them of their current marital status: married or divorced.

See Appendix A for complete coding criteria for the all variable scales.

Results

I will use three strategies for data analyses. The first section contains analyses of descriptive information and correlations among the study variables. Descriptive statistics will be reported, including the means, standard deviations and range for each variable. I will use these statistics to determine what percentage of marriages in our sample is characterized by at least moderate levels of conversational narcissism and invisibility prenatally. In the second section, intercorrelations among the predictor variables and among the outcome variables will be reported. In the third section, I will investigate the extent to which prenatal interaction patterns influence marital satisfaction and partners' mental health over the transition to parenthood, including an examination of whether narcissism paired with other maladaptive behaviors forecast negative outcomes *above and beyond* conversational narcissism in the marriage alone using logistic and OLM hierarchical multiple regression.

All analyses were conducted in SPSS with standardized z scores to allow a comparison of the disparate (binary, continuous, and discrete) data. As discussed previously, although each coder rated couples prenatally on the nine independent variable scales both overall and on their 10 minute response to each of the three questions, the scores used in the present study are the average score of the two coders on their overall interaction assessment as no significant shift between questions was found (see Table 1).

Descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations for all study variables are presented in Table 2. Table 3 presents frequencies for prenatal independent variables, and

Table 4 presents frequencies for dependent variables. Correlations among husband measures assessed prenatally are shown in Table 5, and among prenatal wife measures in Table 6. Table 7 displays correlations between all prenatal study independent variables, and Table 8 presents correlations between the six 24 month and 7 year dependent variables.

Frequencies determining prevalence. As predicted and presented in Table 3, conversational narcissism characterized more than 50 percent of marriages in the sample. To calculate the frequency analysis, groups of individuals were formed. First, "nonnarcissists" consisted of pairings of partners who both scored below a two on the narcissistic scale. "Nonnarcissists paired with narcissists" consisted of marital dyads in which one partner scored two or above on narcissism and one partner scored below a two. Conceptually this was done because a one on the narcissism scale represented an absence of narcissism, and any other score, two to seven, indicated some degree of conversational narcissism. A score of four indicated overt displays of narcissism. Finally, dyads with both spouses who scored a two or above on the narcissism scare were designated as "both narcissists." As shown in Table 3, frequency analysis of these categories found that neither partner was conversationally narcissistic in 22 percent of the pairings. Both partners were found to exhibit conversational narcissism in 46 percent of the marriages. Altogether, one or both partners in 78 percent of the marriages demonstrated conversational narcissism in their interactions.

A second frequency analysis was performed to determine the prevalence of high levels of conversational narcissism in marriage. A "narcissistic spouse" variable was created with partners both scoring lower than four on the narcissism scale designated "no dyadic high narcissism," and pairings with at least one spouse with a score of four or more "dyadic high narcissism." Four was used as a cut off for high narcissism as it is both the midpoint of the individual narcissism scale and the lowest score on the scale assigned to overt disrespect toward the spouse. A frequency analysis showed that 39 percent of marriages in the sample were characterized by high conversational narcissism, see Table 3.

Invisibility characterized 41 percent of marriages in the sample. For this frequency analysis, groups of individuals were formed. "Both noninvisible" were defined as pairings of partners who both scored a two or below on the invisibility scale. "At least one invisible," included pairings in which one partner scored above a two on invisibility and one partner scoring a two or below. The rationale for the cutoff was that a one on the invisibility scale represents an absence of invisibility, and any other score, two to seven, some degree of invisibility. Finally, dyads with both spouses scoring above a two on the invisibility scare were designated as "both invisible." As shown in Table 3, frequency analysis of these categories found neither partners were invisible in 59 percent of the pairings. In 32 percent of the couples, at least one partner was invisible. Both partners were found to exhibit invisibility in 9 percent of the marriages. Altogether, one or both partners in 41 percent of the marriages demonstrated invisibility in their interactions.

Conversational narcissism and passivity. Next, the relationship between narcissism in one spouse to invisibility and passivity scores prenatally was examined. It was hypothesized that high narcissism scores in one spouse would be correlated with invisibility and passive strategies in the other. As expected and shown in Table 7, wife narcissism was found to be positively significantly related to husband invisibility *(*ρ=.40, $p<.01$), and husband narcissism was found to be positively related to wife invisibility*(*ρ=.54, $p<.01$). As for narcissism and passivity, wife narcissism was found to have a significantly positive relationship to husband passivity *(*ρ=.28, $p<.01$), but husband narcissism was not significantly related to wife passivity (ρ=.17, ns).

Conversational narcissism and gender. It was hypothesized that men would be more likely than women to engage in conversationally narcissistic behaviors. As expected, an independent samples t test with gender (males versus females) as the independent variables and levels of individual narcissism as the dependent variable indicated that men were significantly more likely to demonstrate conversational narcissism than women *(*$t = 2.34$, $p < .05$).

Conversational narcissism as predictor of marital satisfaction. Next, the question of whether marriages characterized by conversational narcissism prenatally predict greater dyadic marital dissatisfaction at 24 months was examined. An independent samples t test was performed using the "narcissistic spouse," "dyadic high narcissism" versus "no dyadic high narcissism," as the independent variable and dyadic marital dissatisfaction when the first child was 24 months old as the dependent variable. Although the t value

indicated a moderate negative relationship, high levels of conversational narcissism in marriage did not significantly predict marital dissatisfaction over the transition to parenthood (t = -.465, ns), and therefore no further analyses were conducted.

Conversational narcissism as a predictor of divorce The fourth hypothesis was that high levels of prenatal conversational narcissism would predict divorce both 24 months and 7 years after the first child was born. As presented in Table 9, two binary logistic regressions were conducted to test how conversational narcissism, as measured by the "narcissistic spouse" variable, predicted "divorce at 24 months" and "divorce at 7 years." Contrary to expectations, high conversational narcissism in marriage did not significantly predict divorce 24 months after the birth of the first child *(*B=.446, ns*).* However, as hypothesized, "narcissistic spouse" significantly predicted the divorce at 7 years dependent variable *(*B=798, $p < .05$*).* Two independent samples t tests with "narcissistic spouse" as the test variable and divorce as the grouping variable were then conducted. The first test with "divorce at 24 months," not divorced versus divorced at 24 months, as the grouping variable indicated no significant relationship between dyadic high narcissism and divorce when the first child was 24 months old *(*t=-1.0*,* ns*).* The second test with "divorce at 7 years" (not divorced versus divorced at 7 years), as the grouping variable showed a significant relationship between high levels of narcissism in the marriage prenatally and divorce at 7 years *(*t=-2.81, p<.01*).*

Next, a hierarchical multiple logistic regression was conducted to determine whether divorce at 7 years was predicted by "narcissistic spouse" and "maladaptive dialogue"

together *above and beyond* the "narcissistic spouse" variable alone. For the first step, the "narcissistic spouse" variable entered using forward selection was used as the model 1 independent variable and then "maladaptive dialoguing" and "narcissistic spouse" variables were added as independent variables in model 2. Although model 1 was statistically significant (B=.85, $p<.05$), the model 2 was not statistically significant (B=.07 ,ns). This analysis indicates that, counter to what was hypothesized, maladaptive dialogue in marriages characterized by extreme narcissism does not predict divorce at 7 years *above and beyond* extreme narcissism alone (see Table 10).

As an exploratory analysis, an additional hierarchical logistic regression was conducted to determine how divorce at 7 years could be predicted by "narcissistic spouse" and "gender pairing" *above and beyond* the "narcissistic spouse" variable alone. For this analysis, a variable, "gender pairing," was created by selecting couples with both scoring lower than four on the narcissism scale and identifying them as "non-narcissist pairings." Couples with a woman scoring three or below and the husband scoring a four or above on the narcissism scale were labeled "husband narcissist pairings." Couples with a husband scoring lower than four and a wife scoring a four or above on the narcissism scale were called "wife narcissist pairings." Marriages in which both partners scored a four or above were "both narcissist pairings." For the first step, the "narcissistic spouse" variable was used as the model 1 independent control variable. For the second step, the "gender pairing" and "narcissistic spouse" variables were used as the independent variables in model 2. Although model 1 was statistically significant (B=.99, $p<.05$),

model 2 was not statistically significant (B=-.23, ns). This analysis indicates that, counter to what was hypothesized, the gender of the narcissistic partner in marriages characterized by high narcissism does not predict divorce at 7 years *above and beyond* high narcissism alone (see Table 11).

Invisibility as a predictor of depression. Correlations and an OLS regression were conducted to test the hypothesis that prenatal invisibility would predict depression at 24 months in one or both partners. Contrary to the hypothesis, an OLS regression with wife invisibility as the independent variable and wife depression at 24 months as dependent variable was not found to be significant (β=.011, ns).

A separate OLS regression with husband invisibility as the independent variable and husband depression at 24 months as the continuous dependent variable also did not yield significant results (β=.07, ns). Next, variables of dyadic depression and dyadic invisibility were examined in an binomial logistic regression to see if prenatal dyadic invisibility predicted dyadic depression at 24 months was accounted for by prenatal dyadic invisibility. "Dyadic invisibility" was entered as the independent variable for the regression and "dyadic depression" was entered as the dependent variable. Contrary to the hypothesis, invisibility in marriage did not significantly predict depression in one or both partners at 24 months (B=-.026, ns).

Discussion

The present study is the first to draw on social exchange theory to understand how narcissistic attention seeking behaviors in face-to-face conversations influence marital dynamics. Specifically, this study examined whether husbands' and wives' narcissistic conversational strategies, levels of active and passive communications, displays of invisibility, and individual and dyadic conversational skills, assessed prenatally, predict partner mental health and marital quality over the transition to parenthood.

Prevalence of Conversational Narcissism and Invisibility

The first question explored in this study was whether conversational narcissism would characterize more than half of marital interactions and whether high conversational narcissism would be present in more than a third of marriages. As predicted, conversational narcissism, as conceptualized by Derber (1979), characterized 78 percent of marriages in the sample and high levels of conversational narcissism were evident in 39 percent of the observed relationships. This finding stands in stark contrast to the estimated 0.5-1 percent of the general population diagnosed with NPD in adulthood and supports Lasch (1979) and Emmon's theory that subclinical narcissism is prevalent in American culture. Finding such high levels of conversational narcissism is remarkably consistent with Derber's observation 28 years ago that some degree of conversational narcissism was present in 75 percent of informal conversations between acquaintances and family members. This finding supports that the view of America as a "culture of narcissism" in which the tendency is for individuals to focus on themselves to the

detriment of others (Lasch, 1979; Emmons, 1987).

Conversational Narcissism and Response Strategies

In the present study, it was hypothesized that high levels of narcissism in one spouse would be correlated with invisibility and passive strategies in the other partner. Husbands of narcissistic wives were likely to display invisibility behaviors, as were wives of narcissistic husbands. This finding supports Derber's theory (1979) that conversational narcissism often creates a dynamic whereby another person is ignored and goes underground.

Also as expected, husbands were more likely to employ passive strategies, such as displaying silent disinterest, when communicating with a narcissistic wife. Results of this research showing a positive significant relationship between wife narcissism and husband passivity support Vangelisti and colleagues' (1990) observation that individuals interacting with conversational narcissists most commonly displayed passive and nonverbal strategies. Wife passivity, however, was not found to covary significantly with husband narcissism. Perhaps gender effects come into play as wives are less likely to be narcissistic, making it less normative for women to display conversational narcissism in marriage. This could mean that narcissistic wives have personality attributes that would demand more passivity from their spouses in comparison to narcissistic husbands.

Although a significant relationship was found between husband narcissism and husband passivity, wife narcissism was slightly negatively and significantly correlated with wife passivity. Conversationally self-absorbed husbands are thus more likely than

narcissistic wives to display passive responses such as no or minimal responses to narcissism from their spouse. This could be because of socialized gender roles and personality differences. This result highlights Derber's point that conversational narcissistic strategies are frequently subtle, such as when conversationalists fail to provide the supportive responses necessary to keep their spouses' topics alive.

One explanation for the fact that a narcissist frequently employs passive tactics is that in 43 percent of the marriages both partners were narcissistic. Passive strategies may be especially important for relationship maintenance. As narcissistic people tend to be defensive and take offense when directly challenged, perhaps passive coping strategies are employed in marriages characterized by narcissism to avoid overt conflict and to maintain at least appearances of civility.

Conversational Narcissism and Gender

The second hypothesis was that men would be more likely than women to engage in conversationally narcissistic behaviors. As predicted in this study, men were significantly more likely to demonstrate conversational narcissism than women. This finding is consistent with Derber's observations (1979), the slight majority of male clinically diagnosed narcissists (50-75%, according to the DSM-IV-TR), (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), and research on the higher survival rate of men's topics (Fishman, 1977, 1983). It also supports Derber's qualitative observations and hypothesis about gender socialization impacting behaviors and levels of entitlement in conversation.

Derber (1979) would attribute this gender difference to the dominant patriarchy of the American class system as he conceptualized conversational attention as a valuable commodity more likely to be claimed and obtained by men in the dominant socio-economic role. He suggests that attention is comparable to an economic resource in our capitalist society, and that women's tendency to give rather than receive attention creates a disadvantage for them in interactions that is an expression of social inequality (Derber, 1979).

Conversational Narcissism and Marital Satisfaction

Another hypothesis was that conversational narcissism in marriage prenatally would predict greater dyadic marital dissatisfaction over the transition to parenthood. Contrary to expectations, conversational narcissism did not significantly predict marital dissatisfaction 24 months after the first child was born. Perhaps, even if spouses view conversational narcissism negatively (Vangelisti, et al., 1990) and perceive it as a cost to their relationship, it is possible that social exchange factors mitigate partners' overall evaluation of the marriage, at least in the first few years.

From an exchange theory perspective, partner reports of marital satisfaction are influenced by factors other than whether their partner is a narcissist. Even though partners may feel that conversational narcissism is a cost to their relationship, they may believe it is so normative that they could not find someone who is less narcissistic. Also, they may consider the positive aspects of narcissism as rewarding, outweighing the cost associated with being a narcissist. Examples of such benefits include money, social status, charisma,

and leadership. Lower status partners in relationships in which there is a great discrepancy in status may be especially prone to tolerating conversational narcissism (Okamoto & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Future studies could explore the impact of discrepancies in education, attractiveness, attachment security, and income on evaluations of marital quality.

Also, conversational narcissism itself may be considered attractive to some partners. Although some spouses may seek a reciprocal attention dynamic and perceive conversational narcissism as a high cost, others may prefer the established dynamic (Kowalski, 1997) as it may reinforce their self-images (Swann, 1983). For the 43 percent of marriages with both partners demonstrating conversational narcissistic behaviors, spouses may be attracted to partners' cognitive similarity (Sjöberg & Thorslund, 1978), personality similarity (Barry, 1970; George, 1990; Schneider, 1987), and attitude similarity (Brehm & Kassin, 1993).

Prenatal Conversational Narcissism Predicting Divorce

An additional hypothesis proposed in the present study was that conversational narcissism and invisibility in marriage exhibited prenatally would predict divorce when the first child is 24 months old and/or when that child is 7 years old. Results indicate that conversational narcissism significantly predicted divorce at 7 years, but not at 24 months after the birth of the first child. Invisibility was not found predictive of divorce at either time period.

Narcissists' game-playing love style, attention to alternatives, and low levels of

commitment suggest that marriages characterized by high levels of conversational narcissism would be more at risk for divorce, so why does this dynamic predict divorce at 7 years and not at 24 months? Perhaps partners initially focusing on the benefits associated with narcissistic tendencies become more aware and weary of their spouses' selfish tendencies over time, and begin to consider it more of a cost in their overall evaluation of the relationship. Conversational narcissists may be so charming that they "cast a spell" on their partners initially, creating an idealized image of the dynamic that may be so desirable that partners may remain in the marriage because it is represents such an intoxicating dream, even if the actual marriage relationship leaves much to be desired.

It is interesting that narcissism didn't predict divorce or dissatisfaction at 24 months, but did predict divorce at 7 years. One explanation is that even if the narcissist's partner is satisfied with their relationship, the narcissist may, over time, feel that they can do better with someone else and seek divorce. Narcissists may grow tired of their partners over a period of years. They may seek one or more novel relationships that will provide them with a fresher and more constant source of narcissistic supply. They may also need their non-narcissist partner to care for their children in the early years and feel more comfortable leaving their partner as their children become more independent.

In this study, we do not know who intiated the divorce or if the separation was mutually agreed upon. If the partner of the narcissist chose to leave, several scenarios are possible. Partners of conversational narcissists may not put up with affairs and attention to alternatives over time. They also may feel more capable of leaving a negating

relationship when their children are old enough to go to school and do not need as much attention. Perhaps they divorce when the child is older because they are then more capable of working outside the home and are less economically dependent on their partner.

The sub-hypothesis that conversational narcissism paired with poor social skills would be more predictive of divorce at 7 years than conversational alone was not found to be more predictive of divorce than conversational narcissism alone. The other exploratory sub-hypothesis that gender and conversational narcissism would predict divorce at 7 years *above and beyond* conversational narcissism alone failed to be supported by regression analysis.

Prenatal Invisibility Predicting Depression

The final issue explored by the current research was whether prenatal invisibility in the marriage predicted depression in one or both partners over the transition to parenthood. Contrary to the hypothesis, neither wife invisibility nor husband invisibility was found to be predictive of depression 24 months after the birth of the child. Perhaps these partners need to be needed and base their feelings of worth on their partners' feedback of how valuable they are as sources of attention.

The degree to which listeners tolerate this negating treatment without becoming depressed is likely to be related to their perceptions of what they deserve given their estimations of personal social exchange value relative to their partner and their comparison level of alternatives. Partners with high self-esteem are unlikely to marry a

person who renders them invisible in the first place. Perhaps invisibility in partners who do not have a well-developed independent identity is an adaptive strategy for relationship maintenance with highly narcissistic conversationalists, and therefore does not cause the type of conscious depression that would be reported on the CES-D self-report.

This study hypothesized that conversational narcissism would predict depression in partners rendered invisible by self-absorbed spouses. Interestingly, instead both dyadic depression at 24 months and conversational narcissism independently predicted divorce at 7 years. This result raises a number of questions to be explored in future research.

Limitations and Future Directions

As discussed in the introduction, one major limitation of the current research was the inherent complexity of factors influencing marital communicative exchanges strategies over time, and the elusive nature of conversational narcissism. Whereas Derber defined the concept as an individual's need for conversational attention at the expense of others, Vangelisti, Knapp, and Daly (1990) suggested that high self-focus is only problematic if participants in a conversational exchange perceive it as negative. However, we did not assess participant perceptions of their partner's narcissistic tendencies. Rather than examining individuals' subjective view of their relationship, the present study focused on the outside observers' assessments. An additional limitation was that the sample was predominantly Caucasian and middle class, and taken from the Austin, TX area, so it was not nationally representative.

As discussed previously, future research could be conducted to gain more information about the role of social exchange factors' influence on partner evaluations of marriage with conversational narcissists. For example, future studies could test for interaction effects with factors such as education, socioeconomics, health, and substance abuse. More targeted research could be done to test the effect of dialogue on intimacy, self-esteem, and marital quality. Future research could also examine how narcissistic communication patterns are related to scores on the NPI measure of subclinical narcissism.

One final limitation was that only depression, marital satisfaction at 24 months, and divorce at 24 months and 7 years were used as measures of partner mental health and marital quality. Examining these factors at 7 years and beyond could yield interesting insights into the long term implications of conversationally narcissistic relationships.

The current study results support Derber's (1979) findings and indicate that conversational narcissism in marriage is normative and predicts divorce when partners' first child is 7 years old. Conversationally narcissistic partners display maladaptive social skills that keep them from establishing effective dialogue likely to promote intimacy and trust with their spouses. The correlation between narcissistic conversational behaviors in one partner and invisibility in the other, and the fact that narcissism, but not invisibility, predicts divorce at 7 years, suggests that invisibility may serve an effective relationship maintenance function. This result calls for a more in-depth investigation into individual mental health and marital quality over time in marriages characterized by conversational

narcissism and invisibility. Future research could use concurrent data about marital mental health and communication patterns, conceptualizing both conversational narcissism and depression as risk factors for marital stability rather than an outcome variable.

Future studies could explore factors contributing to partners' dynamics and perceptions of communication patterns within relationships and shed light on the stability of the dynamic as well as potential intervention strategies. Although narcissism is a stable trait, targeted preventative communication therapy may be possible to help couples give each other the love and attention they need. Couples could learn more effective ways to communicate with each other before their child is born to increase their chances of maintaining healthy partnerships over the long term.

Table 1

Pearson's intercorrelations between overall interaction code used for analyses and individual ten minute question codes

Variables	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
1. Dyadic dialogue	.88**	.91**	92**
2. Wife passivity	.76**	.88**	.88**
3. Husband passivity	.77**	.87**	.90**
4. Wife narcissism	.72**	.86**	.94**
5. Husband narcissism	.76**	.81**	.83**
6. Wife invisibility	.85**	.86**	.93**
7. Husband invisibility	.59**	.74**	.77**
8. Wife conversational appropriateness	.78**	.83**	.83**
9. Husband conversational appropriateness	.74**	.65**	.78**

** $p < .01$ level , 2-tailed.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Prenatal Interaction and Outcome Measures

	N	Mean	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Prenatal Interaction Measures						
Dyadic dialogue	116	4.67	1.58	5.00	2.00	7.00
Wife Passivity	116	3.24	1.15	5.00	1.00	6.00
Husband Passivity	116	3.36	1.33	5.00	1.00	6.00
Wife Narcissism	116	2.16	1.37	6.00	1.00	7.00
Husband Narcissism	116	2.67	1.72	6.00	1.00	7.00
Wife Invisibility	116	1.59	1.21	6.00	1.00	7.00
Husband Invisibility	116	1.28	0.64	4.00	1.00	5.00
Wife Conversational Appropriateness	116	4.88	1.40	6.00	1.00	7.00
Husband Conversational Appropriateness	116	4.59	1.59	6.00	1.00	7.00
Outcome Measures						
Wife marital satisfaction-24	87	5.47	1.14	5.00	2.00	7.00
Husband marital satisfaction-24	87	3.79	0.57	3.00	3.00	6.00
Wife depression-24	90	9.77	6.61	32.00	0.00	32.00
Husband depression-24	90	8.50	6.64	40.00	0.00	40.00
Divorce-24 months	90	0.06	0.23	1.00	0.00	1.00
Divorce-7 years	90	0.16	0.36	1.00	0.00	1.00

Table 3

Frequency table for prenatal independent variables (N=93)

	Count	Percent
Dyadic conversational narcissism		
both non-narcissistic	20	22%
at least one narcissistic	73	78%
both narcissistic	43	46%
at least one high narcissist	36	39%
Dyadic invisibility		
both non-invisible	55	59%
at least one invisible	30	32%
both invisible	8	9%
Individual response strategies		
wife passive	28	30%
wife active	65	70%
husband passive	38	41%
husband active	55	59%

Table 4

Frequency table for dependent variables

	Count	Percent	N
Dyadic depression-24 months			93
both not depressed	63	68%	
one depressed	24	24%	
husband	11	11%	
wife	13	13%	
both depressed	6	6%	
Marital Quality-24 months			93
both happily married	56	60%	
unhappily married	31	33%	
divorced	6	5%	
Martial Status-7 years			90
divorced	14	15%	
not divorced	76	85%	

Table 5

Pearson's intercorrelations among husband measures assessed prenatally(N=93)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Husband narcissism	—				
2. Husband invisibility	-.10	—			
3. Husband passivity	.26*	.02	—		
4. Husband conversational appropriateness	-.73**	.07	-.34**	—	
5. Dyadic dialogue	-.68**	-.11	-.34**	.69**	—

** $p < .01$ level , 2-tailed. * $p < .05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 6

Pearson's intercorrelations among wife measures assessed prenatally (N=93)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Wife narcissism	__				
2. Wife invisibility	-.07	__			
3. Wife passivity	-.24*	.36**	__		
4. Wife conversational appropriateness	-.62**	-.19	-.01	__	
5. Dyadic dialogue	-.38**	-.47**	-.21**	.60**	__

** $p < .01$ level , 2-tailed. * $p < .05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 7

Pearson's intercorrelations among marital interaction measures assessed prenatally (N=93)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Dyadic dialogue	—								
2. Wife passivity	-.21**	—							
3. Husband passivity	-.34**	-.06	—						
4. Wife narcissism	-.38**	-.24*	.28**	—					
5. Husband narcissism	-.68**	.17	.26*	.24*	—				
6. Wife invisibility	-.47**	.36**	.20	-.07	.54**	—			
7. Husband invisibility	-.11	-.21*	.02	.40**	-.10	-.04	—		
8. Wife conversational appropriateness	.60**	-.01	-.30**	-.62**	-.30**	-.19	-.36*	—	
9. Husband Conversational appropriateness	.69**	-.12	-.34**	-.19	-.73**	-.46**	.07	.39**	—

** $p < .01$ level , 2-tailed. * $p < .05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 8

Pearson's intercorrelations among dependent variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. 24 month Wife dissatisfaction	__					
2. 24 month Husband dissatisfaction	-.17	__				
3. 24 month Wife depression	-.02	-.01	__			
4. 24 month Husband depression	-.01	.06	.04	__		
5. Divorce 24 months	.25*	-.07	.10	.27*	__	
6. Divorce 7 years	-.03	.15	.02	.17	.57**	__

** $p < .01$ level , 2-tailed. * $p < .05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 9

Binomial logistic regression analysis for partner narcissism as a predictor of divorce (N=89)

	Divorce at 24 months			Divorce at 7 years		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Exp(B)
Prenatal Narcissistic spouse	.45	.46	1.56	.80**	.31	2.22

** $p < .01$ level , 2-tailed. * $p < .05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 10

Hierarchical logistic regression analysis for narcissism and dialogue predicting divorce (N=89)

	B	SE	Exp(B)
Step 1			
Narcissistic spouse	.85*	.39	2.33
Step 2			
Narcissistic spouse			
Maladaptive dialoguing	.07	.37	1.08

* $p<.05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 11

Hierarchical logistic regression analysis for narcissism and gender pairing predicting divorce (N=89)

	B	SE	Exp(B)
Step 1			
Narcissistic spouse	.99*	.48	2.68
Step 2			
Narcissistic spouse	-.23	.45	.80
Gender pairing			

*$p<.05$ level, 2-tailed.

Table 12
Binomial logistic regression analysis for narcissism and depression predicting divorce (N=89)

	B	SE	Exp(B)
Prenatal dyadic narcissism	80*	.36	2.22
24 month dyadic depression	1.15**	.33	3.16

** *p*<.*01* level, 2-tailed. * *p*<.*05* level, 2-tailed.

Appendix A

Prenatal Coding Sheet

One sheet to be completed for each of the three questions posed to the couple

Dyadic Conversational Narcissism

Maladaptive dialogue (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Adaptive dialogue

Scripted, rehearsed (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Immediacy of Presence*
Predictable patterns (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Unanticipated consequences*
No recognition of "strange otherness" (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Recognition of "strange otherness"*
Competitive orientation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Collaborative orientation*
Guarded (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Vulnerability*
Egocentric (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Mutual implication*
Absence of temporal flow (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Temporal flow*

_____Individual Characteristics

Wife's characteristics

Active (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Passive

Non-narcissistic (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Narcissistic
No exploitation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Exploitation
Not self-absorbed (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Self-absorption
No entitlement (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Entitlement
No lack of empathy (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Lack of empathy

Not-invisible (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Invisible
Not focused on others (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Focused on others
No denials of personal needs/desires (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Denial of personal needs/desires
Self-blame (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) No self-blame
No sign of seeking external validation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Seeking external validation
Not passive aggressive (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Passive aggressive

Conversationally inappropriate (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Conversationally appropriate

Husband's characteristics

Active (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Passive

Non-narcissistic (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Narcissistic
No exploitation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Exploitation
Not self-absorbed (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Self-absorption
No entitlement (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Entitlement
No lack of empathy (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Lack of empathy

Not-invisible (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Invisible
Not focused on others (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Focused on others
No denials of personal needs/desires (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Denial of personal needs/desires
Self-blame (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) No self-blame
No sign of seeking external validation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Seeking external validation
Not passive aggressive (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Passive aggressive
Conversationally inappropriate (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Conversationally appropriate

Individual Characteristics Key:

Passivity: Fails to respond or responds in most evasive/least assertive way possible given social norms. Avoids conflict and confrontation. Unresponsive. Ignores bids for attention. Does not reply to partner in ways that are supportive of the other person, the relationship, or the topic.

Narcissistic: arrogant and self-absorbed, demonstrates a sense of entitlement, a tendency towards exploitiveness, a diminished capacity for empathy, excessive envy, and a lack of sustained enthusiasm for activities or relationships.

> **Exploitation:** *Actively or passively teases partner, sabotages partner, makes cynical comments, displays negative attitudes towards partner, communicates disrespect with nonverbals (ex: rolling eyes). Interrupting, talking over, talking rapidly. "Demand tickets" (statements that require the other to respond) (Nofsinger, 1975). "Iceberg statements" (cryptic comments which "beg" for further explanation). "One-upping" or ignoring the legitimacy of the other's disclosure. Only required civil responses, very few discretionary efforts to support topics.*
>
> **Self-absorption:** *Reinterpretations relevant to self, changes topic to focus on self, does most of the talking, acts oblivious to signals and bids for attention from partner. "I" statements (to exclusion of "we" statements). Boasting, questions that demonstrate superior knowledge. Negating the validity of all self-criticism or obsessing over criticism. Use of extensive detail when speaking. Giving opinion/advice. Successes or failures attributed solely to the self. Only required civil responses, very few discretionary efforts to support topics.*
>
> **Entitlement:** *Verbal or non-verbal messages that acts superior or arrogant, boasts about abilities, communicates "I'm okay, you're defective" verbally or non-verbally. Complaining, Putting others down. Terminology that is unfamiliar to listeners without explanation. Only required civil responses, very few discretionary efforts to support topics.*
>
> **Low capacity for empathy/vulnerability:** *Low disclosure of own feelings, emotions and low empathy for the vulnerable feelings and emotions expressed by partner.*

Conversational appropriateness: The degree to which each partner is able to skillfully exhibit socially saavy conversational skills in an interaction. Low scorers exhibit awkward timing and inappropriate content of responses that does not respond to the partner supportively. High scorers show savvy attention to subtext and what is happening with the spouse. They diffuse tension with cleverness and charm. They pay attention to partners' bids for conversational attention and reply in ways that show attention to needs and desires of partner. Even if they do not satisfy them, they address them.

Dyadic Conversational Narcissism Classification

Dyadic Dialogue Key (from Cissna and Anderson, 1994):

Non-adaptive dialoguing: Inability to balance self and other focus in an interaction. Either too passive/invisible or too narcissistic for dialogue to occur.

- **Immediacy of Presence:** Participants are relatively uninterested in bringing about specific outcomes. Their communication is to a large extent unscripted and unrehearsed. They are concerned with the "here" and "now" of communication.
- **Unanticipated consequences:** Dialogue leads to communication that cannot fully be predicted. It is fundamentally improvisational.
- **Recognition of "strange otherness":** Participants refuse to assume that they already know the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the other. They are willing to be surprised by unfamiliar positions different from their own.
- **Collaborative orientation:** Dialogue involves a high level of concern, both for self and for the other. This does not rule out heated exchange, but does take the focus away from winning or losing.
- **Vulnerability:** Dialogue involves risk. Parties are willing to share their ideas as well as be persuaded by others.
- **Mutual implication:** Each speaker anticipates a listener or respondent and incorporates him/her into one's utterances. Dialogue is a process in which speaker and listener construct self, other, and their talk simultaneously.
- **Temporal flow:** Dialogue emerges from a past, fills the present, and anticipates some future. It is also a process within which isolated segments cannot be separately analyzed.

Appendix B

Prenatal Individual Narcissism

Narcissistic:
Non-narcissistic (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Narcissistic
Arrogant and self-absorbed, have a sense of entitlement, a tendency towards exploitiveness, a diminished capacity for empathy, excessive envy, and a lack of sustained enthusiasm for activities or relationships.

Exploitation:
No exploitation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Exploitation
Actively or passively teases partner, sabotages partner, makes cynical comments, displays negative attitudes towards partner, communicates disrespect with nonverbals (ex: rolling eyes). Interrupting, talking over, talking rapidly. "Demand tickets" (statements that require the other to respond) (Nofsinger, 1975). "Iceberg statements" (cryptic comments which "beg" for further explanation). "One-upping" or ignoring the legitimacy of the other's disclosure. Only required civil responses, very few discretionary efforts to support topics.

Self-absorption:
Not self-absorbed (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Self-absorption
Reinterpretations relevant to self, changes topic to focus on self, does most of the talking, acts oblivious to signals and bids for attention from partner. "I" statements (to exclusion of "we" statements). Boasting, questions that demonstrate superior knowledge. Negating the validity of all self-criticism or obsessing over criticism. Use of extensive detail when speaking. Giving opinion/advice. Successes or failures attributed solely to the self. Only required civil responses, very few discretionary efforts to support topics.

Entitlement:
No entitlement (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High)Entitlement
Verbal or non-verbal messages that acts superior or arrogant, boasts about abilities, communicates "I'm okay, you're defective" verbally or non-verbally. Complaining, Putting others down. Terminology that is unfamiliar to listeners without explanation. Only required civil responses, very few discretionary efforts to support topics.

Low capacity for empathy/vulnerability:
No lack of empathy (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Lack of empathy
Low disclosure of own feelings, emotions and low empathy for the vulnerable feelings and emotions expressed by partner.

	Narcissism
1	Non-narcissistic. No evidence of excessive self-focus. Goes beyond discretionary supportive responses beyond civil obligations. Does not ignore signals and bids for attention from partner. Acknowledges criticism without obsessing over or denying it. No evidence of being verbally and non-verbally inattentive to the other's disclosure. No contempt shown for feelings and emotions expressed by partner. No attempts at exploitation or disrespect detected. No evidence of cheap-shots or putting partner down.
2	
3	Moderate, inconsistent interest or care for partner's opinions and well-being displayed. Some discretionary supportive responses beyond civil obligations, but some level of detachment. Sometimes responds to disclosures, signals, and bids for attention from partner. Acknowledges criticism but are a bit defensive or tend to want to discuss at length, but not obsessively. Moderate consideration shown for feelings and emotions expressed by partner. Is sometimes attentive and responds sensitively to conversational cues from partner. No evidence of overt disrespect, but some level of indifference displayed.
4	
5	
6	
7	Very narcissistic. No interest or care for partner's opinions and well-being displayed. Very few or no supportive responses beyond civil obligations. Shifts attention and focus to self as often as possible. Verbal or non-verbal messages conveying superiority or arrogance such as complaining, putting spouse and others down, communicates "I'm okay, you're defective" verbally or non-verbally. Acts oblivious to signals and bids for attention from partner. Negating the validity of all self-criticism or obsessing over criticism. Use of extensive detail when speaking. Displays negative attitudes towards partner. Communicates disrespect. One upping or ignoring the other's disclosure. Boasting. Low disclosure of own feelings or emotions and little consideration shown for feelings and emotions expressed by partner.

Appendix C

Prenatal Individual Invisibility

Invisibility:

Not invisible Low 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 High Invisible

Focused on partner to the exclusion of self. Looks to partner for external validation. A tendency towards denial of personal needs and desires. Demonstrates passive aggressive and self-blaming behaviors.

Focus on others

Not focused on others Low 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 High Focused on others

Focuses on partner almost obsessively. Deflects efforts to turn attention to self. Does most of the listening. Very sensitive to signals and bids for attention from partner. Reinterpretations relevant to partner and others. Acts like partner is okay, but s/he is "defective" and not worthy of attention or regard. Very little or no disclosure of wants, needs, preferences. Easily swayed.

Self –blame

No self-blame Low 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 High Self-blame

Very quick to accept blame for anything remotely "wrong." Extreme self-effacement. Does not articulate personal strengths, except in the realm of caretaking others.

Denial of personal needs and desires

No denials of personal needs/desires Low 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 High Denial of personal needs/desires

Refusal or inability to express personal needs, desires, and opinions. Balks at times when requested to take a stand or state personal preferences not relative to partner or someone else.

External standards for self-evaluation

No sign of looking for external validation Low 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 High Seeking external validation

Looks to partner for approval, seeks praise and approval, acceptance from partner. Very careful not to
upset partner or do anything that would run counter to wishes/desires/preferences of partner.

Passive aggression

Not passive aggressive Low 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 High Passive aggressive

Subtle evidence of indirect control attempts and manipulations. No direct requests for desired outcomes, but uses techniques such as guilt and shame to get needs met.

Invisibility

1	Not invisible. No behavioral evidence of focusing on others to the exclusion of self. No extreme caretaking observed. Not intrusive, self-sacrificing, self-blaming. Does not allow self to be exploited easily. Does not engage in extreme giving or self-effacement behaviors. Not overly concerned with partners' opinion of him or her. Does not seem perturbed when partner doesn't need help. Does not seem uncomfortable receiving support or deflect questions about him or herself.
2	
3	
4	Puts partner and others above self to the detriment of self. Acts inferior or apologetic for having opinions, feelings, and needs. Frequently shifts conversational focus to partner or others. Little self-disclosure. Overly nurturant, caretaking to the extreme, gives advice, overly helpful and supportive. Tolerates and invites subtle insults and disrespect.
5	
6	
7	Invisible. Acts as if only partner and others matter. No expression or indication of knowledge or legitimacy of personal needs and desires. Reinterprets questions, topic, or discussion to revolve around partner or others, changes topic to focus on others rather than self. Lets partner do most of the talking. No self-disclosure, obvious discomfort receiving attention or support. Acts inferior or overly self-effacing. Tolerates overt insults, accepts verbal abuse, repeatedly apologizes, communicates "I'm defective, you're okay." Overly nurturant, caretaking to the extreme. Looks to partner for validation, attempts to gain favor by giving support, being helpful, and giving advice.

Appendix D

Prenatal Individual Passivity of Response Strategies

Passivity:

Active (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Passive

Fails to respond or responds in most evasive/least assertive way possible given social norms. Avoids conflict and confrontation. Unresponsive. Ignores bids for attention. Does not reply to partner in ways that are supportive of the other person, the relationship, or the topic.

	Passivity
1	Extremely active in response: Responds assertively to almost every conversational and interpersonal challenge. Directly confronts concerns, especially related to conversational narcissism from partner. Example: Tells him/her what s/he thinks or feels about behavior Shifts topic to self to "give them a taste of own medicine…politely cut them off to include self." Shift topic to another topic that hopefully partner will not have much to say about. Demonstrates efforts to maintain the floor. Example: look them dead in the eye and talk with a direct and meaningful tone.
2	Mixture of direct active strategies (see 1) and indirect active strategies confronts, but indirectly. Attempts to use sarcasm, joking or other indirect references to draw partner's attention to behavior Example: use sarcastic tone or make a joke Shift topic (see 1)
3	
4	
5	Somewhat passive: some efforts to physically avoid encounters, flat out ignore, don't answer questions, don't laugh at jokes. Silently listening (or pretending to listen) letting partner talk about self until s/he runs out of things to say. Leave taking: verbal or nonverbal efforts to leave the environment.Attempts to demonstrate that what partner is saying and/or doing is of little interest to the listener. Act non-interested. Act totally bored, like their story is completely uninteresting. Reduced response. A delay or lack of response to what the conversational narcissist is saying and or doing. Example: look away, make short responses
6	Mostly indirect active strategies confronts, but indirectly. Attempts to use sarcasm, joking or other indirect references to draw partner's attention to behavior Example: use sarcastic tone or make a joke Shift topic (see 1)
7	Extremely passive: Fails to respond or responds in most evasive/least assertive way possible given social norms. Avoids conflict and confrontation. Avoid person, efforts to physically avoid encounters, flat out ignore, don't answer questions, don't laugh at jokes. Silently listening (or pretending to listen) letting partner talk about self until s/he runs out of things to say. Leave taking: verbal or nonverbal efforts to leave the environment. Attempts to demonstrate that what the partner is saying and/or doing is of little interest to the listener. Act non-interested. Act totally bored, like their story is completely uninteresting. Reduced response. A delay or lack of response to what the conversational narcissist is saying and or doing. Example: look away, make short responses

Appendix E

Prenatal Individual Conversational Appropriateness

Conversational Appropriateness:

Conversationally inappropriate (Low) 1---2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) conversationally appropriate

The degree to which each partner is able to skillfully exhibit socially saavy conversational skills in an interaction. Low scorers exhibit awkward timing and inappropriate content of responses that does not respond to the partner supportively. High scorers show savvy attention to subtext and what is happening with the spouse. They diffuse tension with cleverness and charm. They pay attention to partners' bids for conversational attention and reply in ways that show attention to needs and desires of partner. Even if they do not satisfy them, they address them.

	Conversational Appropriateness
1	Demonstrates little to no social skills, awkward, timing and content of responses not sensitive to audience, even rude/insulting sometimes, poor choice of words. Ignores bids for attention from partner, does not reply to partner in ways that are supportive of the person, the relationship, or the topic. Allows and causes interpersonal tension to build. Goes for the jugular—hurtful topics for partner. Does not honor preferences or requests or comfort levels. Does not respond well to criticism or feedback.
2	Horrible social skills
3	Bad social skills
4	Average social skills
5	Good social skills
6	Great social skills
7	Stellar social skills, clever, charming, appropriate responses that show saavy attention to subtext and what is happening with the other person. Says and does things to avoid problematic communications or misunderstandings…proactive, uses humor. Diffuses tension with conversational skill. Pays attention to context and partner's bids for attention, replies to partner in ways that show attention to needs and desires of partner, the relationship, or the conversational topic. Even if not satisfying them, addressing them. Responds smoothly and confidently to feedback, even negative.

Appendix F

Prenatal Dyadic Adaptive Dialogue

Adaptive dialoguing:

Maladaptive dialogue (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) Adaptive dialogue
The level of reciprocity of conversational exchange exhibited in the couple interaction. Ability to balance self and other focus in an interaction.

Immediacy of Presence:
Scripted, rehearsed (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Immediacy of Presence*
Participants are relatively uninterested in bringing about specific outcomes. Their communication is to a large extent unscripted and unrehearsed. They are concerned with the "here" and "now" of communication.

Unanticipated consequences:
Predictable patterns (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Unanticipated consequences*
Dialogue leads to communication that cannot fully be predicted. It is fundamentally improvisational.

Recognition of "strange otherness":
No recognition of strange otherness (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Recognition of strange otherness*
Participants refuse to assume that they already know the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the other. They are willing to be surprised by unfamiliar positions different from their own.

Collaborative orientation:
Competitive orientation (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Collaborative orientation*
Dialogue involves a high level of concern, both for self and for the other. This does not rule out heated exchange, but does take the focus away from winning or losing.

Vulnerability:
Guarded (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Vulnerability*
Dialogue involves risk. Parties are willing to share their ideas as well as be persuaded by others.

Mutual implication:
Egocentric (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Mutual implication*
Each speaker anticipates a listener or respondent and incorporates him/her into one's utterances. Dialogue is a process in which speaker and listener construct self, other, and their talk simultaneously.

Temporal flow:
Absence of temporal flow (Low) 1—2---3---4---5---6---7 (High) *Temporal flow*
Dialogue emerges from a past, fills the present, and anticipates some future. It is also a process within which isolated segments cannot be separately analyzed.

	Adaptive Dialoguing
1	Robotic responses that do not appear to take new information coming from partner into conversational account. Predictable patterns, no recognition of strange otherness, competitive dynamic, guarded—avoid vulnerability, no risks taken in conversation, focus on winning or losing points, being right or wrong, Detached, egocentric, absence of temporal flow. Assumptions that one or both already knows the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the other. Unwilling to be surprised by unfamiliar positions different from their own. Parties unwilling to share ideas or be persuaded by one another. No evidence that speaker is incorporating the partner as listener. No reference to past or anticipation of future. Conversation can easily be analyzed in terms of separate isolated segments.
2	
3	More maladaptive than adaptive
4	Balance of maladaptive and adaptive dialoguing
5	More adaptive than maladaptive
6	
7	No evidence of attempts to bring about specific outcomes or fall into scripted or rehearsed type of pattern. Concerned with and open to the "here" of communication. Surprising, creative exchanges with unanticipated consequences. Recognition of partner as a separate person with independent spirit and personality, no evidence of assumption that they know the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of the other. collaborative orientation—involves a high level of concern, both for self and other. Does not rule out heated exchange, but focus is not on winning or losing Each speaker anticipates a listeners or respondent and incorporates him/her into utterances. Simultaneous construction of self, other, and conversation. , vulnerability displayed—dialogue involves risk,parties willing to share ideas and be persuaded by one another, mutual implication, temporal flow: dialogue emerges from a past, fills the present, and anticipates the future. Conversation as a process within which isolated segments cannot be separately analyzed.

Appendix G

24-month Individual Depression

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD)
The following scale was developed by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies (Radloff, 1977).
This is a short, self-reporting scale intended for the general population.
Copyright: Center for Epidemiologic Studies, National Institute of Mental Health;
Publisher: West Publishing Company

Assessment
Scale items:
Below is a list of some of the ways you may have felt or behaved. Please indicate how often
you have felt this way during the past week by checking the appropriate space.
1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.
4. I felt that I was just as good as other people.
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.
6. I felt depressed.
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.
8. I felt hopeful about the future.
9. I thought my life had been a failure.
10. I felt fearful.
11. My sleep was restless.
12. I was happy.
13. I talked less than usual.
14. I felt lonely.
15. People were unfriendly.
16. I enjoyed life.
17. I had crying spells.
18. I felt sad.
19. I felt that people disliked me.
20. I could not get "going."
USE THE FOLLOWING RESPONSE ITEMS:
1. Rarely or none of the time (Less than 1 day)
2. Some of a Little of the Time (1-2 days)
3. Occasionally or a Moderate Amount of the Time (3-4 days)
4. Most or All of the Time (5-7 days)

Scoring the 20-item version of the CES-D:

1. Each of the 20 items in this instrument is assigned one value of 0, 1, 2 or 3. For all but four items (see below), the values are assigned as follows:

   Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day) = 0
   Some or a little of the time (1-2 days) = 1
   Occasionally or a more moderate amount of the time (3-4 days) = 2
   More or all of the time (5-7 days) = 3

   The four items with reversed scoring are the following:

   4. I felt that I was just as good as other people.
   8. I felt hopeful about the future.
   12. I was happy.
   16. I enjoyed life.

   For the four items with reversed scoring, the values should be assigned as follows:

   Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day) = 3
   Some or a little of the time (1-2 days) = 2
   Occasionally or a more moderate amount of the time (3-4 days) = 1
   More or all of the time (5-7 days) = 0

2. Once you have assigned a value for each item, compute a total, adding the values for each of the 20 items. The resulting score should range between 0 and 60. Do not compute a total if there is more than one answer missing.

3. High scores on the CES-D indicate high levels of distress. A score $\geq$ 16 suggests a clinically significant level of psychological distress. It does not necessarily mean that the participant has a clinical diagnosis of depression. In a general population, about 20% would be expected to score in this range.

Appendix H

24-month Happily Satisfied Couples

Marital Opinion Questionnaire

The Marital Opinion Questionnaire was used to obtain a global assessment of each spouse's satisfaction with the marriage. The questionnaire, adapted from a measure of life satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976), involves two parts: (a) a series of 7-point semantic differential scales in which respondents characterize their relationship with bipolar adjectives, such as miserable-enjoyable, rewarding-disappointing, discouraging-hopeful, and (b) a single-item 7-point global assessment of the respondent's overall satisfaction with the marriage. Participants were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their marriage over the past two months. Following Campbell and his colleagues, the average rating of the eight semantic differential items that clustered together in a series of actor analyses was added to the score on the overall assessment of marital satisfaction and divided by two to create an index of marital satisfaction with possible scores ranging from low (1) to high (7) marital satisfaction.

Part I: *Ten 7-point semantic differential scales in which respondents characterize their marital relationship with bipolar adjectives*.

Instructions: Next are some words and phrases which we would like you to use to describe how you feel about your current romantic relationship. For example, if you think your relationship is very boring, circle "1" right next to the word "boring." If you think your relationship is very interesting, circle "7" right next to the word "interesting." If you think your relationship is somewhere in between, circle the number that best represents your feelings.

Boring 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Interesting
Enjoyable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Miserable
Hard 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Easy
Useless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Worthwhile
Friendly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Lonely
Discouraging 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Hopeful
Full 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Empty
Tied-down 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Free
Rewarding 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Disappointing
Doesn't give me
much chance 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Brings out the best in me

Part II: *Single-item, 7-point global assessment of respondents' overall satisfaction with their marriage. Respondents were asked to base their ratings on their marriage over the previous 2 months.*

Scoring: *The average rating of eight semantic differential items that clustered together were added to the score on overall assessment of marital satisfaction and divided by 2 to create an index of marital satisfaction ranging from 1-7.*

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VITA

Lisa Leit was born in Reading, PA on June 3, 1973, the daughter of Susan Gossett Loch and Alan Arthur Loch. Her sister, Amy Olrick, brother-in-law Jeffrey Olrick, and nephews Joshua and Drew live in Virginia. Her brothers, David and Brian Loch, reside in Pennsylvania. She grew up in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. Upon completing her work at Strath Haven High School in 1991, she entered The Pennsylvania State University in State College, PA. After three and a half years of coursework and one year spent in Germany on a research grant, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English with Honors in Science, Technology, and Society in January, 1996. From 1996 to 1998, she worked as an English middle school teacher in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas as a Teach for America Corps member. She then worked for two years for an international law firm in New York City before working from 2000-2002 in Taos, NM as a property manager. She entered graduate school at The University of Texas at Austin in 2002, completing her Master of Arts in Human Ecology in 2006 and now works at the University of Texas Undergraduate Writing Center.

Permanent address: 9009 Great Hills Trail, Apt. 1014
Austin, TX 78759

This thesis was typed by the author.